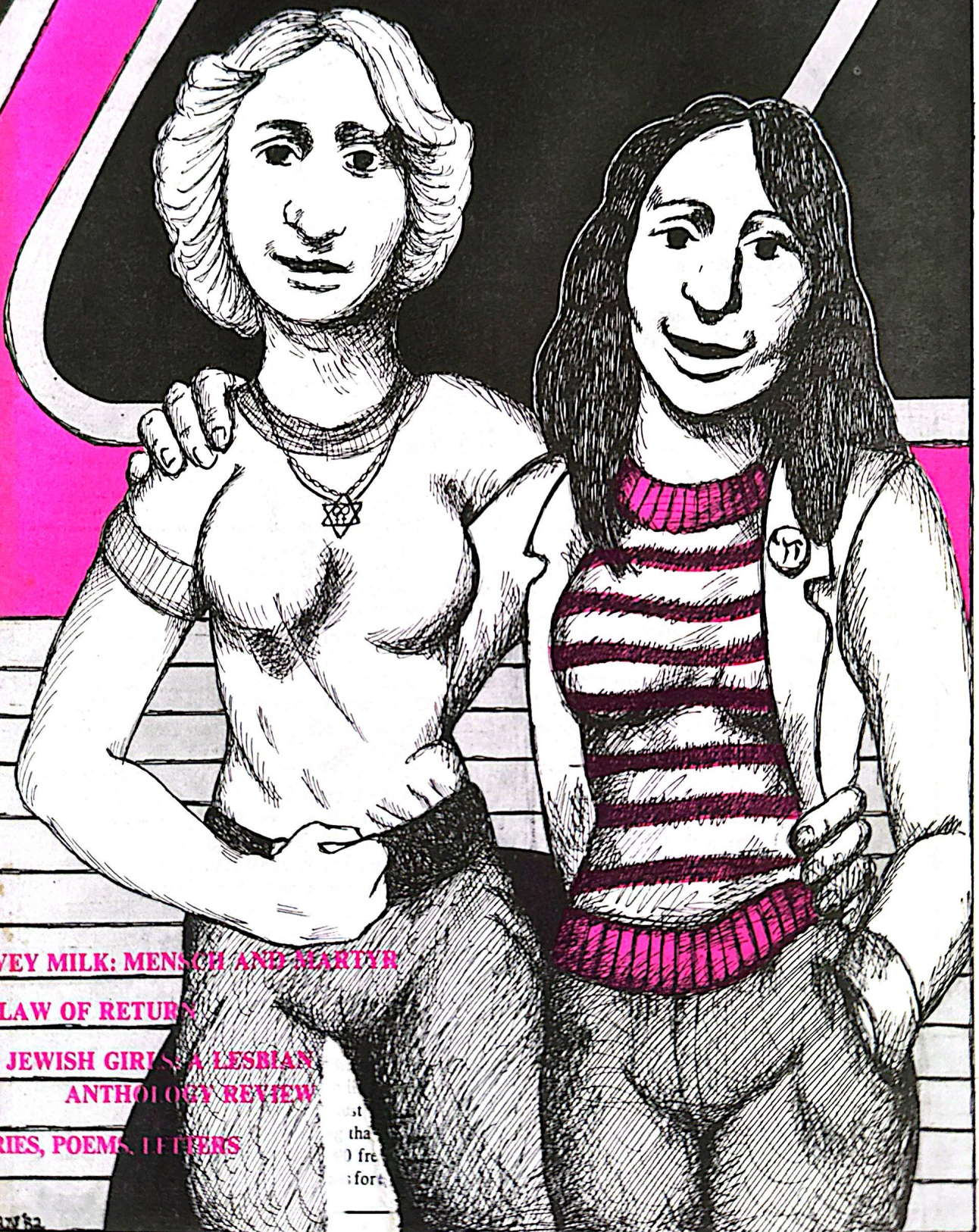


# SHMATE

A JOURNAL OF PROGRESSIVE JEWISH THOUGHT VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2 JUNE/JULY 1982 PRICE \$2.50



HARVEY MILK: MENSCH AND MARTYR

THE LAW OF RETURN

NICE JEWISH GIRLS: A LESBIAN  
ANTHOLOGY REVIEW

STORIES, POEMS, LETTERS

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STEVE FANKUCHEN Editor/Publisher

## AUTHORS

Evelyn Torton Beck was born in Vienna in 1933, emigrated to Italy in 1938, and grew up in Brooklyn. She is the mother of a Jewish lesbian and a Nice Jewish Boy, and regularly juggles the academy and activism.

Harry Einberg is an engineer by trade and teller of Talmudic tales by love. Greatest living authority on Fankuchen mishpuchah. Warm and wise lifelong influence on editor of obscure Jewish rag. Brooklyn Dodgers fan.

Joel Ensana's awards/publications/resume is a foot long and includes The Best Short Plays of 1969, the Norman Corwin Award, and a Schubert Fellowship. A hassled editor's delight. Someday I'd like to hear how he came to write "A Cousin In The Bronx" twenty years ago.

Rabbi David Gordis is Vice President of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

Brucha Gutrajman was born into a poor Orthodox Warsaw family in 1905. She worked as a metal and garment worker until her retirement in 1977 and has had a lifelong involvement with progressive social labor, and political movements, as well as Yiddish culture.

Aliza Maggid is a founding member of the Am Tikva lesbian/gay Jewish group in Boston. She is a long-time feminist activist and builder of alliances on a community, national, and international level.

Naphtali Offen is a long-time gay Jewish community activist transplanted to San Francisco from the Big Apple.

Mindy Niuta Rinkewich was born in 1929 and worked in French, German, and Slavic studies at Brooklyn College and Columbia. She studied for twelve years at the Yiddish school of the International Workers Order and has published poems, children's stories, and articles in Yiddish and English.

Teya Schaffer is an Oakland lesbian Jewish mother acceptable to the non-Jewish community some of the time, the straight community some of the time, and Totland most of the time.

Elaine Starkman is a frequently published poet (though not yet a household name), mother of four, and denizen of Walnut Creek, California.

Judy Stone of San Francisco is an enamelist/artist, Buberist, and Jewish lesbian activist. Her article marks the end of a ten-year writer's block.

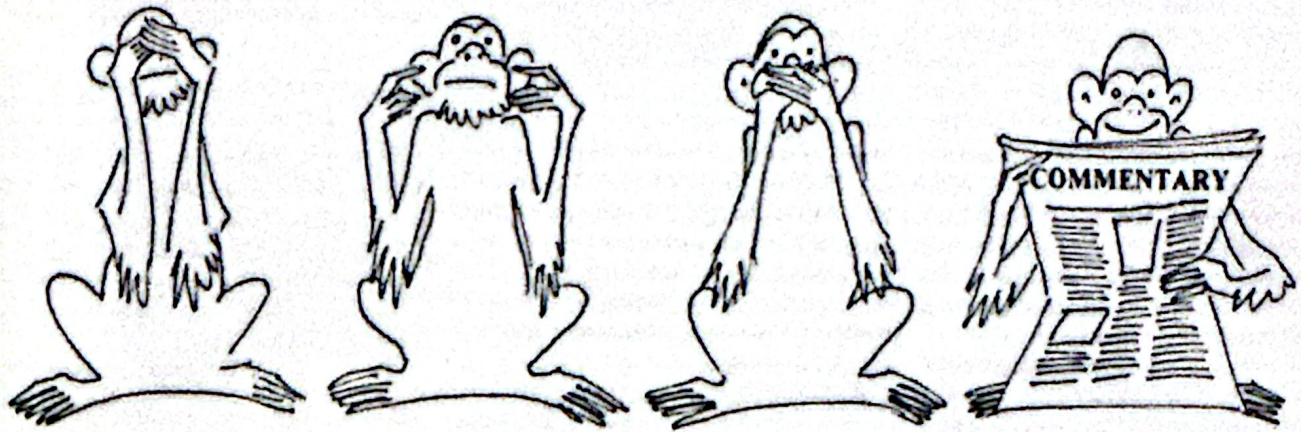
Maida Tilchen is a long-time lesbian activist who is a writer and promotions manager for Gay Community News. Her writing has appeared in a number of publications including *Lavender Culture* and *The Lesbian in Literature* (third edition).

Helen Weinstock escaped the faceless clerical pool of the Depression by washing spittoons in pool parlors, operating a lathe, and working as a Coney Island barker, among other jobs. Since 1970 she has made her home in Israel, where she works as a nurse.

Subscriptions to Shmate are \$15 for an 6 issue year. Group and institutional rates are \$25. Add \$6 for first class or Canada (payable in American funds). Ad rates are \$15/column inch for 1"-3" and \$50/4 column inches. Submissions are welcomed but will only be returned if enclosed with a self-addressed stamped envelope. Copyright © Shmate. All inquiries and subscriptions should be addressed to:

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# SHMATE

Welcome to the second issue of Shmate. Response to the first issue has been very encouraging. It would appear from your letters that the effort to create a magazine that is more than a product to be consumed has struck a responsive chord. It is very gratifying to see the energy so many of you have put into passing on your thoughts and feelings. The prepublication letters printed in the first issue were mostly objections to the name of this magazine. The feedback this time has been more diverse.

It is not the intent of this magazine to be controversial. However, since its purpose is to provide a reasonably non-sectarian vehicle for ideas and facts which have little or no access to other general circulation Jewish media, controversy will at times be generated. It is my hope to be inclusive rather than exclusive, to encourage a wide range of Jews — and non-Jews — to consider Shmate relevant to their lives and dreams. Sometimes this simply does not work. I was selling the first issue of Shmate at Israel Independence Day in San Francisco. A number of people who were about to buy copies became incensed when I told them what was going to be included in this issue. They walked away either muttering or yelling. So be it! Unless Shmate does something new, unless it can contribute to our effort to free ourselves and our people from ideas and situations which imprison us, it has no justification for its existence. That is the standard against which the magazine should be judged.

This issue has been made easier — and more stimulating — by the publication on May 1 of *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*. Among its many other virtues, this

book confirms what a number of folks have surmised for the last few years: namely, that much of the best work being done around questions of Jewish identity and issues of non-rightist anti-Semitism is being done by Jewish lesbians, both individually and collectively.

My sentimental favorites in this issue are two very similar pieces, "A Cousin In The Bronx" and "With Love, Lena". The juxtaposition of the former, written by a man over twenty years ago and the latter, written by a woman recently, was a natural.

As to near future issues: one will focus on the family, including mixed child rearing, non-nuclear families, singles, childless couples, mixed relationships, and all the associated permutations and etceteras.

Another issue will focus on the relations between Jews and Blacks, both individually and collectively. Articles on these and other topics would be most welcome.

Items for *Shmate Awards and Right is Wrong* would also be appreciated, as well as other articles, graphics, and poems. Material you want returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

In the first issue of Shmate I made a serious mistake: there was no fund-raising pitch. Almost 3000 free copies were mailed out to a fairly select list. It was hoped a substantial number of subscriptions would result. Unfortunately, most people did not realize that subscriptions were wanted, that they would not continue to receive Shmate free. So, the error must be corrected as best one can considering that Shmate cannot afford to send out 3000 free copies of this issue. What is needed is for all of you who support Shmate,

who think the idea deserves the chance to develop and grow, who think the Jewish community needs an alternative voice, to subscribe. But, even that is not enough. You are needed to push Shmate: to friends, relatives, your local library, organizations — to everyone. Shmate needs you to get the word out. Small magazine economics are, at best, horrendous. Shmate has no angels, no slick advertising campaign, no organizational backing. It is produced as an unpaid labor of love and will sink or swim on your support. Please subscribe now — though yesterday would have been better. Give a gift sub — you won't have to worry if it's the right size. Pest-ter your school, synagogue, or community library to subscribe. You teach a course? So, maybe the syllabus could include a specific issue of Shmate. Maybe a birthday gift. And, if you can afford it, a contribution above the subscription cost would be helpful.

Shmate will be issued every two months. A year subscription is \$15 for individuals and \$25 for libraries, groups, and organizations. Those who subscribe before May 28th, the publication date for this issue, will receive an eight issue sub as previously announced. *Those of you who have a red mark next to your name and address will not receive another issue unless you subscribe.* This issue will be mailed to most of you on June 1. If you do not receive it in what you believe to be a reasonable amount of time, complain to the post office. Some people didn't receive their Shmate for a month last time.

Copies of Issue #1 are still available as either part of your subscription or for \$2.50 per copy.

Steve Fankuchen



## WHAT'S IN A NAME II

tempts to define "secular Judaism", continuation of your multi-generational approach.

Judy Strasser  
Madison, Wisconsin

The LETTERS section in this issue of *Shmate* is divided into two parts. The first part, which follows, deals with comments on the name as well as the contents of the first issue. The second part, which is located elsewhere in this issue, encompasses one letter and several replies to that letter.

When last we left the great What's-In-A-Name Game, the visiting team, the Cons, were outscoring the Pros. However, with a strong middle inning rally the home team has fought back into the lead. The winner will be announced in the next issue. However, from here on out, only those ballots accompanied by a check or other indication of commitment to this magazine, will be counted. You should pardon the mixed metaphors.

As to the questions raised in these letters: some are answered in the lead editorial; some are answered by the content of this issue; some answers will evolve over time.

The first two letters are from folks who had previous letters published in Issue #1, letters which strongly opposed the name of the magazine.

It's a good read, full of good intentions; quite obviously you've got a lot of resources at your fingertips. The Bialystok Ghetto conversations are pretty incredible. I even have enough countercultural spirit left in me to soften towards your chosen title, though I think your "analysis" of divergent feelings about it — that the Old Leftists don't like it and the New Leftists do — needs much deepening and questioning "why." I see myself more as an immigrant from the Woodstock Nation than a citizen-in-good-standing, and *Shmate* did wake some nostalgia in me for the "Old Country", so to speak, where freaks were freaks and straights were straights and never the twain would meet. Perhaps I feel too much pain about the right wing upon our Jewish communities, about Israel's mental illness, about the web of alienation and misery that capitalism is spinning around us all, to be able to tolerate glibness, or self-denigrating humor; it's hard, sometimes, to differentiate between the laughter of the Pepsi Generation and sincere laughter.

Larry Bush  
Assistant Editor,  
Jewish Currents  
New York City

I was surprised to find many good articles in your first magazine. I liked the article by Steve Fankuchen "Resistance and The Holocaust", I hope you are not wedded to the

name, *Shmate*, and change it to *Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen* (Raisins With Almonds) as it fits a Fankuchen. [variously, an omelette, pancake, an other edibles—ed.]

I would not jump on the wagon with stories on gay, lesbian, and so on; there are enough defenders, accusers, and noisemakers on this subject.

P. S. The money may come yet.

Rivka Barlev  
El Cerrito, California

Enclosed is my check for \$15 for a subscription to your mag. May I take exception to your comment on the letters page? As a member of the old left from the 30's, 40's, and 50's, and as a "poison" with a strong Yiddish background, I love the name and hope that the contents of future issues will be equally good.

Maurice Rosen  
Berkeley, California

I love the name. Hooray for making gay, lesbian, and feminist concerns your theme for issue #2.

Larry Wisch  
San Francisco, California

Read your *Shmate* from cover to cover. Picked it up from my mailbox. Didn't know where it came from and almost discarded it with the vitamin ads etc. The familiar Yiddish word "*Shmate*" interested me. I started reading and reading. So, it's a first issue rich with feeling and meaning, poetic images of life and death. The essence of life, all written in a profound poetic idiom. So there's something to grieve about, to laugh or smile at.

Clara Robbin  
Berkeley, California

Congratulations on the first issue of *Shmate*. You have really done a splendid job. I'm proud to have my name associated with it. I still don't understand the basis for my Jewish identity, but from the fact that I read through almost every article in *Shmate* with great interest — and in many cases enjoyment — I know that that identity is a strong one.

Emily Stoper  
Chair, Political Science Dept.  
University of Calif., Hayward  
Oakland, California

Some things I'd like to see: much tighter editing, better proofreading; some reflections on what it means to be the Jewish half of a mixed marriage with kids; more at-

Don't let anybody put you down for a "cutesy" name — I still have trouble telling the difference between the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress. That's what happens when you pick up a nice solid establishment-sounding name. Keep up the good work!

Marian Henriquez Neudel  
Chicago, Illinois

When I got your ad in the mail I thought the name was ridiculous and that maybe you were a sick joke. The fate of the Jewish people and how that relates to the more important fate of the world's billions of people should not be taken lightly.

I am an anti-Zionist Jew and no self-hater. I believe that we will not have much of a future without socialist revolution... Alone, we won't survive. The dynamic forces that unleashed the Holocaust are still not spent and the need is for seriousness on our part. There is an accelerating polarisation in the world and in this country between oppressed and oppressors. The state of Israel and the main U.S. Jewish organizations are lined up with the oppressors. We need serious dialogue as to what we can do and how we can be with the rest of the oppressed — our only hope.

Eugene Weixel  
New York City

Despite the self-deprecating name, we enjoyed the first issue and hope that succeeding ones will be nearly as good (at least).

Morton & Esther Stavits  
New York City

What about today's refugees — emigrants from the Soviet Union? And what about the Jewish Movement in the Soviet Union today? I know sooner or later you will publish articles about this problem, but you should have started with them.

Rudolph Budeshtsky  
El Cerrito, California

I've read it cover to cover very carefully. I like it, I agree with but, but it didn't stir me. That's something I wanted but I guess you weren't after.

I didn't want to read the Holocaust stuff. I read it last because I was resistant. Then I read it — it was very good. I liked the lead off article on Sephardic witches. I especially liked your book review and the awards. Humor was good. I wanted it and would like even more.



I didn't especially like either my article on the All Peoples' Congress or the Medem article. They seemed out of place. Also, Larry Bush's article was interesting but awkward—how does it fit into Shmate?

My problems with the above three stem from some basic questions: who is Shmate for? A journal of a movement? If so they fit; but, then what of the rest? Is Shmate to be a mass appeal magazine? If so, those three don't fit with the other articles.

What are Shmate's politics? An opening issue usually gives some kind of political outline. Even if vague, some political direction is needed. Bush's article seems to be speaking for Shmate. I just wish it were clearer.

Myron Perlman  
Chicago, Illinois

I have been enjoying the first issue of Shmate, particularly the piece Coming of Age. So little is known about the Sephardic heritage in the general Jewish community. I hope you will continue to give it a spot on the pages of your magazine as well as other informative material on Jewish culture.

Mindy Rinkewich  
New York City

I like the "Right Is Wrong" inset. As an activist in Common Cause, I battle Helms, Falwell, Hatch, etc. Unless we persist, the New Right will overwhelm us. Even Barry Goldwater has raised his voice against that movement.

The one element of the magazine I personally disliked was the quality of the poetry. I do not object to free form—some of our finest is written thus—but I think some of it was not in good taste and inferior to the quality of the prose articles. But, that's a matter of opinion, only.

Ethel Solovay  
Arizona

This is truly distasteful in the full meaning of the word: tasteless. You are discouraging even potential friends. Add my name to those who think that "Shmate" is repulsive.

Max Knight  
Berkeley

I find the easygoing tone and name of your publication rather refreshing; too many papers take themselves too seriously and their contents are indeed less than serious. You seem to have chosen the opposite way.

Maxim Ghilan  
Editor, Israel & Palestine  
Paris, France

As for Issue #1, there is much I like about the magazine and a few things which concern me. I am pleased that there is a Jewish publication ready to take up women's, lesbian and gay issues on a regular basis. Please make it regular. There is nothing wrong with special issues. We certainly need for special attention to be given to the Holocaust, as well as to the issues of women's liberation, lesbian and gay liberation, the Middle East, and several other struggles which are critical to our survival as Jews and as human beings. But I do not want to read special issues at the expense of consistent coverage. I feel it is crucial that we constantly expose and connect the various questions we face as progressive Jews. For example, in an issue on the Holocaust, there could have been an article on the role of women in the resistance; and why not draw out the fact that people were slaughtered for being homosexuals, or even for "suspicion" of homosexuality. For that matter, people were killed for being political dissidents as well. Bringing out the treatment of others groups besides Jews strengthens, not weakens, our case. When people in power have needed scapegoats, Jews have often and horrendously been used. But so have others. This gives us the opportunity and obligation to join in struggle with other oppressed people. That Jews have been strong supporters in various liberation struggles of other peoples speaks well of us. Let's tell the whole story, not selective parts.

Overall, though, I liked the magazine. There was a good balance of prose and poetry, and I liked seeing poetry integrated into the magazine content rather than stuck off on a page by itself as it often is in other publications. I thought most of the articles were good. I especially liked yours on resistance and Myron, Les and Peter's on the All-People's Congress. I was also glad to see a report on the West Bank (another topic I hope continually appears in Shmate), and was intrigued by Deborah Marcus' article on the Shiddium.

Janet Tobachman  
Chicago

Never have I been so moved to write to editors & co. of a publication—but my delight and surprise encourages me to scribble this on the back of an envelope right as I sit here perusing my mail! Admittedly, when I receive notice of the impending publication of a new Jewish progressive magazine I gulped a cynical "ugh" visions of a little radical politics — you know — "same-ole-song" and some "lovepeace&happiness"—then figured it would be a California local and you know what they say about Californians! — and filed it in the pile of requests for donations that don't nearly pull by tsedakah heart strings.

But truly — I am im-pressed! "SHAMTE" — I like the name — a "rag" — I thought to myself — cute that they sent me a copy even though I didn't donate — and then I read the page on "What's in a Name" — already I like it! Good reader-magazine communication! Made me immediately want to jump on the bandwagon — so by the way — I think you really ought to spell "SCHMATEH" like so, really "schmaltzing" up the sound of each syllable!

Having interrupted reading my mail to write to you, I obviously haven't managed to read all of "SCHMATEH" — but what I have leafed through so far is GOOD! Re-printing of old material, poetry — Daniel Lev's "Open Poem to an Anti-Zionist Friend" is EXCELLENT! 'book review well written, cartoons, important informational articles, and laughter! out loud mirthful guffawing, unabashedly roaring alone here in my kitchen.

Robin Miller  
Florence, Mass.

I enjoyed the magazine very much—I liked the writing. I especially enjoyed it because it had an 'Up' feeling about it. Your article about Jews fighting back — so great — I'm so tired of hearing about 'death wish', etc. — Jews are always in the forefront — fighting for causes — and I enjoyed Paul Zis-sel's 'Portrait of My Father' — because at the end I was left with the feeling of how sensitive Jewish people can be — and you set the tone with that wonderful dedication to your father. The whole magazine was very 'human' — with a touch of the past and the present 'Right is Wrong.'

Joel Ensana  
San Francisco

I love your magazine's name — SHMATE, though the spelling doesn't quite do it the justice our spoken mother tongue (MAMA LOSHEN) does. Calling a magazine literally a "rag" has a long literary-journalistic tradition while the many layers of meaning inherent in the Yiddish word make the choice particularly rich and meaningful for me. As Jews of a different sort, kicked around by the Orthodox and anti-Semite alike, we certainly have felt like Shmattahs (sic.) at times; also, the idea of being genuinely who we are as people, in our old clothes, in our true selves, in our alternative thinking seems to go with your magazine's philosophy. From one shmattah to another, then, Mazel Tov for making irreverence and humor intrinsic to your understanding of what it is to be culturally a Jew and yet a citizen of the world.

Marianne Ware  
Guerneville, California



The late 1970's was a turning point for the Gay Liberation movement in America. As a result of Anita Bryant's dramatic crusade to stem the tide of Gay acceptance that was quietly sweeping the country, the issue was thrust into the consciousness of Americans like never before. She warned the Miami electorate that if they did not repeal the Gay Rights ordinance, their city would become "like San Francisco — a cesspool of sex." Perhaps no other single statement contributed more to the unprecedented wave of Lesbian and Gay migration to San Francisco at the end of the decade.

Harvey Milk was a down-to-earth New York Jew who moved to San Francisco somewhat prior to the Gay wave. He was almost 40, had recently left his comfortable Wall Street job and sought a meaningful change in his life. He found it as the principal spokesperson for the Lesbian and Gay community in his adopted city.

Milk opened a small camera shop in the Castro, the neighborhood that was to become the major Gay ghetto in the country. He got involved in the neighborhood, and before long, found himself running for the Board of Supervisors, the city's legislative body. After several defeats, he became the first openly-Gay elected city official in the country. Eleven months later, he and Mayor George Moscone, who was his close ally, were shot dead by the most Gay-hating supervisor on the Board.

Randy Shilts has documented this story in *THE MAYOR OF CASTRO STREET: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HARVEY MILK*. He goes well beyond providing a biography of one man and indeed offers a meaningful chronicle of the decade that has brought us to where we are now.

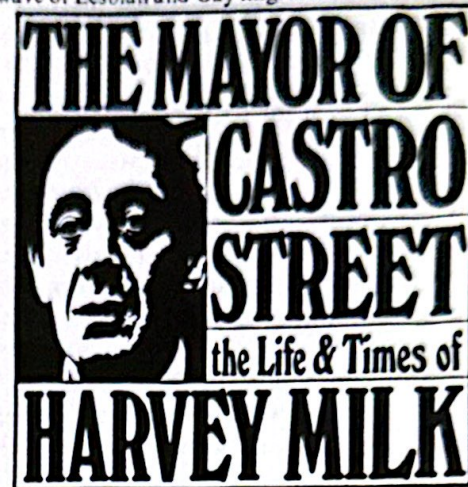
Written in Shilts' easy, though often schmaltzy and sometimes manipulative style, *THE MAYOR OF CASTRO STREET* reads quickly and engrossingly. As a matter of fact, partly because of the style and partly because I still find the whole episode unfathomable, I was shocked to find myself hoping that it would end differently — that perhaps, at the last minute, Harvey would be whisked out of town and miss the assassin's bullet. Wasn't it bad enough that our hero was killed in real life? Couldn't we at least have a happy ending in print?

But, alas, let's not be ridiculous. I read the book while riding the D-train on a recent visit to New York. I wept profusely throughout, which, I believe, provided me protection from the ever-increasing army of maniacs who ride the train these days. (Don't mess with him. He must be crazy!)

Shilts' graphic description of the murders in instant-replay style was unsensational. With details supplied by the coroner's office, we get what is probably a fair piecing together of the last minutes of Milk and Moscone. Without emphasizing the gruesome, the book provides a wealth of specifics. Knowing what happened, as tragic as it was, provides some kind of comfort.

But the real tale, the one brought out of the closet initially by journalist Warren Hinckle after the Dan White trial, is what Shilts builds up to. The double assassination that amounted to a coup in San Francisco; how Milk's popularity had spread way beyond the Gay community; how in coalition with seniors, disabled, racial minorities, labor unions, and other progressives, a serious campaign was mounted to wrest control of the city from the powerful downtown interests; how Margo St. James, head of one of the local unions, was advised by a police informant almost a year in advance that Mayor Moscone would be killed; how the police celebrated the murders and the mild sentencing of the killer; how the D.A. withheld damning evidence and threw the case.

If you aren't familiar with the specifics before you read the book, your blood will boil with outrage. If you are, it will bring it all back painfully; but, you'll get some satisfaction knowing that others are going to learn what really happened. Then again, it's likely we'll never know what really happened.



Shilts has been criticized for taking poetic license where he was attempting to provide journalistic detail. He does this, though not excessively. He did extensive research and when he occasionally errs, it does not detract from the impact of the book. At \$14.95 for the hard-bound, you may choose to wait for the corrected paperback.

In his epilogue, Shilts says "but on Castro Street, businessmen were largely concerned with business, politicians were largely concerned with candidates, and homosexuals were largely concerned with sex." Here Shilts' own homophobia rears up, fueling the myth that for all Gay people, sex is an occupation. Perhaps he was attempting to be cute, or just trying to finish his sentence symmetrically. Nonetheless, such accusations are extremely dangerous and offensive. I was pleased that he generally avoided stereotyping and, in the main, his analysis of events can be trusted.

I was repeatedly surprised how many of Harvey's early companions went on to distinguish themselves in their own right, like Tom O'Horgan, the producer of *HAIR*, Craig Rodwell, founder of New York's Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore and the annual Gay Pride marches, and Billy Sipple, who tackled Sara Jane Moore when she attempted to assassinate Gerald Ford. Also woven into this story, are Jim Jones and his followers.

The appendix is particularly moving — a collection of four of Harvey's most stirring speeches and the transcript of the famous "political will" tape wherein he mentions the names of acceptable and unacceptable candidates to replace him in the event of assassination.

Shilts touches upon a host of ironic and poignant episodes. In a letter written two days before his murder, Harvey tells Tom O'Horgan how much he loved the opera he saw that night and ends with, "Ah, life is worth living." During the Briggs Initiative campaign to prevent gays and their supporters from teaching, Harvey received a phone call from a 17-year-old midwestern Gay whose parents were going to institutionalize him for being homosexual. Harvey urged him to get on a bus and run away. The man cried and said he couldn't because he was in a wheelchair.

This is a wrenching book to read. The nightmare that was November, 1978, will remain with us always. But so too will Harvey's most important legacy—hope. He spoke about it constantly while campaigning. He spoke about it in his first remarks on the Board of Supervisors. His message inspired when he was rabble-rousing among us, and continues to inspire when reading about the man. With hope, you CAN fight City Hall.



# NICE JEWISH GIRLS

*Nice Jewish Girls: A lesbian Anthology;*  
Evelyn Torton Beck, ed.; Persephone Press;  
Watertown, Mass.; 1982

by JUDY STONE

In the 1950's, as I was growing up, a "nice Jewish girl" in Ohio, the question either voiced or hinted at discretely was, what will happen when we all assimilate? There was a hidden horror of being rendered non-existent in the melting pot of the United States.

Be Different! Be a Jew! But don't be *too* different! These were the contradictions which guided my childhood.

Throughout the sixties and seventies I lived those contradictions. They permeated my politics, my career, and my sense of self. As parts of me began to cry out for recognition, I affiliated myself with the women's movement and came out as a lesbian. In the mid-seventies my earliest and most deeply rooted part began saying "now is the time." I decided to tear down the wall between myself and my Jewishness. Why I chose that particular time to "come out" as a Jew I can only guess. Letty Pogrebin in her article "anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement" offers this generalized explanation:

"It is no accident that this Jewish coming out process has in many feminist communities been spearheaded by lesbians. Having opened the windows on one secret identity and not only survived but flourished, lesbians seem less willing to live with another part of their identity repressed . . ."

Ms. June, 1982

An awakened sensitivity to my oppression as a lesbian triggered a heightened awareness of my oppression as a Jew.

During the past six years I have watched the growing tide of emerging Jewish lesbians. Reclaiming our identities in the face of anti-Semitism within the lesbian and women's communities as well as the community-at-large, many of us can, for the first time, love our whole selves.

We are beginning to tell our personal histories with pride and pain. We are examining our differences and similarities with a new sense of understanding. Therefore, it was with joy that I greeted the publication of *Nice Jewish Girls*.

*Nice Jewish Girls* is the first collected group of essays, poems, fiction, letters, and photographs by and about Jewish lesbians. The anthology is an audacious attempt to present as many issues of concern to Jewish lesbians as possible from as many different personal perspectives as possible. It is meant to be used as a tool to facilitate dialogues among Jewish lesbians, the women's community, and the Jewish community. I would add that Jews in general could also benefit from passing the book on to their friends. I foresee Jewish lesbians giving the book to their Gentile lovers and friends as well as their parents to help them understand.

The anthology can be read as a series of "coming out" stories arranged in a loose format under the section heading of Jewish lesbian identity, the family, Israel, and critical approaches to Jewish literature and liturgy. Because the book has such broad aims, it sometimes suffers from trying to include too much. The photo section by JEB, for example, is too small to have much impact as a visual commentary on the diversity of Jewish lesbians.

Evelyn Beck's introduction provides not only the unifying framework for the anthology, but also a summary of all the consciousness-raising work which has been done thus far by Jewish lesbians. Beck points out the obvious parallels between being Jewish in a Gentile society and being a lesbian in a straight society. The result is anti-Semitism for the former and homophobia for the latter. Of specific concern to the Jewish lesbian are: her identity as a lesbian in the Jewish community, where lesbianism is seen as a threat to the Jewish family structure, and therefore a threat to Jewish survival; her identity as a Jew in the lesbian community, where Jewishness is often dismissed as only a religious identification, a synonym for hated Zionism, a symbol for all that's bad in the world.

There are several themes which weave throughout *Nice Jewish Girls*: anti-Semitism as it is encountered in the lesbian-feminist community; the combatting of internalized oppression by examining our roots and coming to terms with one's own "Jewishness"; the reclamation of the Holocaust as a unique reference point for Jewish lesbians; examination of the bases for the dialogue we must have with other oppressed peoples.

The theme of anti-Semitism as it is encountered on a personal level is a pervasive element of this book. The recognition of anti-Semitism

is an important part of coming out as a Jew. Gloria Greenfield, publisher of Persephone Press and contributor to *Nice Jewish Girls*, describes specific incidents of anti-Semitism during tours to promote the press' publications. Beck cites several cases in which Jewish women have been outraged by acts of anti-Semitism in the women's community and, having made that outrage known, found themselves faced with outright denial of the validity of their perceptions. No Jewish woman should have to carry the burden of proof that anti-Semitism exists within the lesbian-feminist community.

Irena Klepfisz, in her article "Anti-Semitism in the Lesbian/Feminist Movement", expands on Beck's introduction with an analysis of the developing anti-Semitic "scenario" in the U.S.: "I find that I am preoccupied not with countering anti-Semitism, but with trying to prove that anti-Semitism exists, that it is serious, and, that as lesbian/feminists, we should be paying attention to it both inside and outside of the movement." (p.46) In the many stories about growing up a "nice Jewish girl" in America there are repeated references to both overt and covert anti-Semitism. What is shared in the descriptions of Jewish oppression is rage. Many of the stories bristle with anger.

Anti-Semitism turned inward, individually or collectively, is a form of internalized oppression, a way of having the victim blame herself instead of those who do her injustice. To combat this, Melanie Kaye's essay "Some Notes on Jewish Lesbian Identity" speaks of reclaiming traditional stereotypes. "I want a button that says PUSHY JEW, LOUD PUSHY JEW, LOUDY PUSHY JEW DYKE. When lesbians reclaim the word "dyke", we are purging it of its negative connotations. When Jewish lesbians redeem "loud and pushy", we are paying homage to Yiddishkeit."

For many of the writers in *Nice Jewish Girls*, the Holocaust has been a catalyst in their search for identity and survival. For Kaye this takes the form of searching history to bring forth stories of women's resistance. Irena Klepfisz in her essay "Resisting and Surviving America" talks about her experience as a survivor and child of survivors of the Holocaust. She analyzes the media cooptation of the Holocaust: "I am convinced that people are turned off to the Holo-

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



must because it has been commercialized, metaphorized out of reality, glorified, severed from the historical fact." (p. 103) Kelpfisz warns that it is a mistake not to let the pain of that terrible event because it keeps us from joining with other oppressed peoples.

*Nice Jewish Girls* reflects a strong Jewish presence already "out", the impact of which has already been felt in the lesbian/feminist movement. As a result, Jewish lesbians are often in the forefront of efforts at building coalitions with others who are oppressed, whether it be because of race, age, class, or disability. Joselyn Segal, a black Jewish lesbian, sees her interraciality as a means to "challenge, confront, and educate the ignorant about the 'other', and to dispute misconceptions about what I am supposed to be..." (p.56)

Even though *Nice Jewish Girls* attempts to present all the facets of Jewish lesbianism, there are omissions. Beck, in her introduction, forges this criticism and apologizes for subjects which were omitted due to lack of documentation. However, there are omissions which can't be blamed on a lack of factual material. For example, there is very little material on how Jewish lesbians, as lesbians, deal with the Jewish community and with their families. It may be that Jewish lesbians have already told their coming out stories, stories that vary with one's ties to family, religion, culture, class, etc. But, if so, they still need to be told again. There is also scant mention in the book about Jewish/gentile lesbian relationships, redefinitions of liturgy, and spiritu-

ality.

As the editor states, however, *Nice Jewish Girls* is just a start. It is an important book in the continuum of writings by women trying to find their place in Jewish history. "this entire anthology," writes Greenfield, "is an act of resistance." Jewish lesbians are resisting invisibility, resisting mutual scapegoating, resisting anti-Semitism, and resisting stereotypes. Resistance is clearly the key to survival as a whole, self-affirming person.

**"I WANT TO RECRUIT YOU FOR THE FIGHT TO PRESERVE YOUR DEMOCRACY FROM THE JOHN BRIGGS AND THE ANITA BRYANTS WHO ARE TRYING TO CONSTITUTIONALIZE BIGOTRY. . . WE ARE NOT GOING TO ALLOW OUR RIGHTS TO BE TAKEN AWAY AND THEN MARCH WITH BOWED HEADS INTO THE GAS CHAMBERS"**

**HARVEY MILK**

## WITH LOVE, LENA

by TEYA SCHAFFER

Dear Sadie,

It's a long time already and it could be longer since last I wrote but as you can see by the crooked letters I am here again. The arthritis is as usual, but better it is to write to Sadie than not, so behind my complaints let it be our secret that my joints uncurl for you.

Sadie, Sadie, am I crazy for writing? After so long what should I tell you? The government gives to the bank, the bank gives to the landlord, and the rent is paid for another month; something's going up in the lot, I don't know what, only that it requires a lot of noises; Mr. Issacson's wife was mugged not two blocks from the hardware and he had a heart attack from . . . is this what you want to hear? as if you didn't know 9th street.

I got a letter from your Norma: everyone's fine, her Laura's baby is walking already, David is making aliyah to Israel this summer. You did well Sadie. Meanwhile life continues. I drink my tea, the Senior Citizens' sends up a hot lunch, every bone hurts, you know how it is Sadie.

Sadie, I could write your name for a whole page. What did they say about names? My Joseph, may he rest in peace, would have known: "Lena, the sages tell us that the numbers of a name reveal the fate of its owner." But what did he know of names or numbers, names and numbers all that is left of those he named. Sadie, I don't cry any more for them. Now that you are gone there is no one to receive my tears.

Remember how we cried the first time we cried together, like animals, like cows, as if our throats were not designed for emoting, the funny ugly sounds that finally made us laugh. And when we could talk I touched the place where Norma was growing in you and asked, "Sadie why did we never cry for our dead before?" and you said, "Because we refused to water the void." Sarah, my princess . . .

I pick up the pen again. I am not in the habit of writing any more and you, you are so finally gone after your bits-and-pieces departure. True the fat from your bones and the hair from your head flew quickly away as if from disaster but the rest . . . a slow dream-like quality to those days and then, suddenly, gone, to the home . . . and your letters, little notes of love encoded in the pages you dictated.

Sadie, I am as foolish as you said I'd be. I never told you the truth about your apartment — its been taken: a family, four of them, poor as poor, crucifix on the wall. I didn't want you to know that you were gone from 9th St. I didn't want to know that I was all that was left of you. One day the new woman put curtains in your window. When I saw them I felt faint like an undergarment had come undone and was sinking down in a pile around my feet — Sadie today nobody read your mail—remember my princess the day we put up curtains . . .

. . . It was so hot, we stripped to our brassieres and still our breath was short. It was like a movie, wasn't it? The hot day a year before that when you met me on the stairway, my one sleeve rolled up and the other sleeve down, and you said "Excuse me," lightly touching the cloth over the numbers, "Excuse me but I think we can survive differently." And I learned to roll up both sleeves, the way you did, and a year later our bare arms touched hot and sticky with July and we rolled ourselves together — just like that.

It is two days since I've begun this letter . . . well, I won't make excuses, there is no rush. I know it wasn't 'just like that' our loving, it had been coming and coming, but when it arrived — it seemed a gift from nowhere. Sadie. Nowhere. Shall I call you that? but it is me who feels without a home while you are a spirit, or a scattered aura . . . or only my memory — SadieSadieSadie according to the teachings of the Mothers of the Dead as long as I can pen your name you will not leave this world, my Sadie, my Princess Sarah . . .

I'll tell you: in the morning, when I awake, sometimes I am disappointed, but at night before my eyes close I pray for the next day. Remember what we worried? that we would be discovered and shamed, that we would in old age regret and repent . . . well we outlived those fears . . . Sadie . . . Sadie: there is a reason I write to you. Do you notice my Sarah my gift that I am still here on 9th street? I mean my Sadie that I am still not dead, that I am once again left alive . . . there grows a fist in my throat, a hand squeezes tight about my heart . . . I write this letter, I bind you to it with your names Sadie Sarah Princess my gift, I call and hold you by the writing of your names Sadie Sarah because my Princess, my gift, I refuse to water the void.



# A COUSIN IN THE BRONX

by JOEL ENSANA

An American flag fluttered from old man Rubel's window, between the fire escape and the chalk blue sky, its gold threads glittering in the spring sun. A gold star hung among the kosher salami and frankfurters in Mrs. Anekstein's delicatessen window. Mrs. Anekstein sat on upright soda case, remembering, saying to a friend, "Sure, do you think I'd forget my Sammie? He fought for this country, and you know, someday I'll go to Belgium. I'll see his grave. But it's so far away, that's what really hurts. Look, who will remember when I'm gone — so far away?" and she shook her head as though trying to shake away depressing memories.

And others remembered. Some went to church to pray and some to the cemeteries carrying wreaths, baskets of flowers with ribbons about them and bouquets of freshly picked violets. Many went to the beach or a movie or watched the parade of Boy Scouts, of soldiers from a nearby Army base, of Daughters of the American Revolution. Many remembered on their day off from work, on this holiday—Memorial Day, many such as Ruthie, as she brushed her hair before the walnut dressing table, surrounded by a tapestry of sunlight.

She sat, recalling how her roommate Esther had hurried about the bedroom in her pink chenille robe, her rabbit trimmed scoffs flapping on the hardwood floor, her hair still in a net, saying, "Ruthie, only twenty-five minutes and you know, last week Mr. Bernstein hinted about being late once too often. Say, didn't you buy mustard last night? Can't have pastrami sandwiches without mustard."

Now Ruthie smiled, thinking, that Esther, what a girl! What a lot of fun. Then she shook her head in disbelief. Over a year. It didn't seem possible. How time flies. Poor Esther. And the smile slowly became an expression of sadness. How Esther had suffered. Sick for almost a year and at the last moment no one around to touch her forehead or hold her hand. I would have to run down to the drug store at exactly that moment. The next door neighbor had thought he had heard a cry, but brushed the thought aside, thinking someone with the TV too loud. And what with the sounds of cars and kids playing in the street. Poor Esther, alone even then.

Ruthie started brushing her hair again, furiously, thinking, I hope they have gladiolas at that corner grocery store. Esther had loved gladiolas. Gladiolas, tall and regal and pink. And Ruthie's sad expression became a smile as she remembered something Esther

had said once, as they had just sat on a park bench, watching a row of gladiolis bowing in the wind. "Just look, Ruthie, how beautiful. They're so laden with beauty they bend over with the weight of their treasure. I wonder why God made them that way. I mean, so they can't even balance themselves." And she shook her head, thinking, poor Esther. I know it's an orthodox cemetery and they don't believe in flowers. Oh well, a few won't hurt. I hope they have some at the corner store.

On the bus, she looked at the pink flowers, their petals wet—the grocer had been watering them with a sprinkling can when she had bought them. Memorial Day, she thought. Thousands of flags, a day for remembering and she recalled when she had first met Esther — at a lecture at the JCC. Something about Japan, Past and Present, or was it Poetry, Past and Present. Then over steaming cups of coffee at the nearest cafeteria, after introducing themselves, they had discussed the program.

"Esther. Esther Mendelsohn."

"My name's Ruthie, Ruthie Myers."

"I just moved here from New Jersey," Esther had said. "Of course, I'd visited New York before, with my folks and the high school graduating class once, but you know what everyone says, 'New York, its all right to visit, but live—never.' But, you know, I like it, very much. My mother died and there was nothing to stay in New Jersey for. And so much to see and do in New York. Me, I'm interested in anything and everything — buildings, people, movie stars, philosophy, theatre organs—say something, I'm interested. Maybe it's just curiosity. Do you think so?"

Ruthie had smiled, "Curiosity, no. It's a sign of intelligence, of being awake, really enjoying life. I think it's swell. This great big wonderful world and so many people act as though they were just passing through a small country town. Everyone just rushing to a retirement, a pension, but you know, I'm the same way. I'm alone a lot. One cousin over in the Bronx, and we hardly ever see each other. Of course I understand, at least I try. After all she has a family. But I have to stay alert. I find company in everything. To me, a good book, the sound of rain, a hot cup of coffee, an old 78 record of Russ Colombo's or a new LP of a tone poem by Vivaldi — wonderful company!"

They had been friends from then on, meeting for lunch, going to the theatre or a museum, searching through old book stores or seeing silent movies for free at the Modern

Museum of Art. Poor Esther had been completely alone, too, Ruthie thought, completely—no cousin even, over in the Bronx.

The bus was a local, so Ruthie made herself comfortable, opening the window and putting her package on the empty seat beside her. Then her memories were stirred again by the cool spring breeze that came in the window, and remembering was so sweet, so wonderful, when thinking about a friend like Esther — so perfectly synchronized with a spring day.

She recalled how they had tried to improve their looks—diets and different hairdos, cosmetics by Helena Rubenstein—but laughingly and to no avail. "Ruthie," Esther had said, "Let's face it. Neither one of us is a raving beauty. What we need to do is start all over again." So, they had walked jauntily, hopefully past the boys at the corner drugstore — only the wind whistling at them and once in a low bow-wow. They both had smiled, but that evening Esther's eyes had been red from crying about her plainness and Ruthie had sworn she would try to lose a few pounds — but cheese blintzes were so good with strawberry jam on top.

Several times they had had dates with fellows from their offices, but Esther had complained of boredom, saying, "All he could talk about was what the Giants would do next year." Ruthie had complained of tired feet from wearing high heels and dancing all evening, when she'd much rather have been home with a good book, a plate of macaroons and a glass of milk.

The bus drove up Fifth Avenue and Ruthie wished the city hadn't scrapped the double deckers — the breeze had always felt good as it rushed past, its light fingers running through her hair.

Ruthie held her package again, as a woman sat down beside her, squeezing in with a huge purse and a shopping bag. "Memorial Day!" she complained. "Couldn't even find a deli open. Besides, I should remember my husband? Him, I'm still trying to forget."

Ruthie turned to look out the window at the trees of Central Park at a Civil War statue, a wreath at its feet, and she thought, forgetting is the easiest thing to do. Still, why forget? Too soon everyone's forgotten. Especially in my little world — the working person's world — a secretary's world at Proctor and Gambles. Places, things — days and nights Christmases and July Fourths, and of course, the mostly quickly forgotten—the

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



people, the nobody's, the crumbed clerks, the dish diggers.

She held the gladiolus closer, away from the large woman beside her, and remembered Esther saying one day, "Ruthie, I get so lonely sometimes, living at the FWCA. Loads of girls, still I get so lonely. Besides, you know how I love to cook, nothing fancy, sometimes a bowl of soup, home cooked. Even an egg tastes better when it's home cooked." Ruthie had agreed.

They had searched for two weeks before they had found a basement apartment in Brooklyn — with a backyard and a huge, airy kitchen. Esther had planted gladiolus bulbs and roasted a chicken, while she had bought a vase, dish towels and a bottle of champagne to celebrate their "homecoming." The apartment wasn't fancy. In fact, it had many faults, such as the birds waking them early, even on Sunday mornings. And they could hear footsteps outside their front windows (once a man had looked in, while tying his shoelaces), and they would see a continuous parade of moving feet — high top shoes, cracked and dusty that walked very slow, dragging time and old age behind them, pumps, pointed toes walking very fast and sprightly, sandals flapping, and suede shoes, dancing first to a shrill whistle. They even made up a game deciding who went with what shoes. In the summer they could hardly sleep from the heat, which made itself right at home and wouldn't budge an inch, so she and Esther would sit outside, brushing away the mosquitoes that had flown over from New Jersey, catching fire-flies and putting them in empty milk bottles—sitting with citronella on their arms and faces waiting for a breeze.

Ruthie smiled, as she thought, what a place. Still we hadn't been lonely anymore.

The bus rolled up in front of the cemetery gates and Ruthie stepped down, then passed beneath the rusty wrought iron arch and walked towards Section W, noticing that it was a very old cemetery, noticing too, the absence of visitors — thinking, strange. A few years pass by and those you know, those you belong to are gone also, and then no-one, just the caretaker.

Past row upon row of headstones, of names now meaningless, of people long since oblivious to spring and flowers and skyscrapers, long since having walked down the street a ways and over a hill, around a corner to oblivion. People who once had whispered to, shouted at and pleaded with — "Becky, I love you, honest" — "No, mommy, please no merchandise" — "Dad, can I have a dollar for the game tonight?"

Ruthie stopped—bent over and straightened a soup can of dead flowers in front of

some stranger's tilted headstone — "Bertha Schwartz" — a decent nothing, just a name, a date. She put a gladiolus in the can, and continued walking up the ordered path.

She recalled Esther lying in bed, one winter day with a bad cold, all bundled up, a sweater over her nightgown, a scarf about her throat, Vilas on her forehead. Ruthie had been feeding her hot chicken soup when Esther had said, very matter of factly, "Ruthie, I love you. You're an angel."

Ruthie had smiled, a little embarrassed.



"Honest, Ruthie," Esther had said, in a hoarse voice, "I love you. For being, for caring. You're a real friend and we all need friends. So there I told you and it's the truth. I love you. I do. I love you."

That was Esther—so full of love, so honest and warm.

Ruthie remembered saying, "You know what? The same here. So long as I live you'll be my best friend. And you know what? I feel closer to you than if you were my own flesh and blood. Certainly, closer than to that one-and-only cousin of mine in the Bronx."

Ruthie noticed the day was rather warm for May, and she stopped to remove her shortie coat and have a drink at a fountain. Finally, she reached Section W and stopped before Esther's headstone and said, almost in a whisper, "Hi, Esther. I brought some glads — pink ones." She said a prayer very simply—she had long since forgotten the ones her bearded grandfather had taught her—

she said, very simply—"Dear God, bless her, be good to her."

She arranged the flowers in a basket—rose that was left over from her last visit, then sat on a rock, which was nearby and stared vacantly at the headstone, which was inscribed, "Esther Mendelsohn—1919-1958." That's all—the opening date and the closing date—nothing to mark the in-between, the main show—the date she had taken her first steps, said her first words, ridden her bike for the first time, worn high heels—the day she had come to the big city, the happy moments, the sad ones, no-one to care about it.

Then Ruthie saw a snail and watched it as it crawled beneath its house of swifty lines along a broad geranium leaf. As it moved a left behind a trail of silvery substance, and Ruthie thought, even snails leave something behind to show the world that they have been there — poor Esther, poor Esther had left a post card from Atlantic City, a book long overdue from the public library (*Call It Sleep* or was it *Ash's East River*) and a stack of programs from the Keith-Albee Vaudeville circuit (green ticket stubs pinned to their pages — green for matinees, only twenty-five cents). Ruthie reached over and touched the headstone, like she used to pat Esther on the shoulder, and said, "That's okay, Esther. I'll remember, Memorial Day or not."

Me, I'm different, Ruthie thought, I won't have anyone even to bring some flowers on Memorial Day — that cousin of mine in the Bronx, the day she would take the trouble. They hadn't seen each other in five years, not since the argument. Yes, once, they had spoken on the phone — an invitation to a home demonstration party of Fuller Brushes.

I'll never forget, she thought, some cousin! She recalled the incident very clearly. It had been a Saturday morning. The shades were all up, sunlight flooding the room, crisp and flaming, as it only can in autumn. The breakfast dishes were still on the table. Esther had gone to the A&P to do the shopping, while Ruthie had started the cleaning. She had been making the beds, when the doorbell rang. There stood Selma—dressed smartly with a fur scarf and an alligator bag, resembling the social workers that used to come to their home during the depression.

"Well, hello, stranger," Selma had said, then kissed Ruthie. They had held hands for a minute—first cousins, only cousins.

"Gee, Selma, I meant to call, but I've been so busy. I've been taking an evening class in shorthand."

"Sure, sure too busy to see your only cousin. Look, I said to Irving, who knows what's happening to her. Another recluse case. I'd better take a drive over. So here I am."

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"Selma, the place is a mess. I just this minute started cleaning," Ruthie explained, quickly removing some house dresses and books from one of the chairs.

Selma sat down, looking at the room, saying, "So keep on with your cleaning. Listen, I know you working girls, Saturday's your only day to clean. You're looking swell, Ruthie, better than ever."

"I think it's home cooked meals and my own place."

"I head you were sharing with another girl."

"You heard?"

Oh yes, you remember Blanche Marcus — went to PS 40 with us. Well, she lives around the block and said she saw you and another girl at the store shopping. Said she sees you and that girl all the time together."

"It's a small world."

"It certainly is!" Selma repeated. "Is she a nice girl?"

"Oh yes, we get along fine. She's awfully nice. I was lucky to meet her and I'm anxious for you to meet her, too."

"I'd like to, very much. But, of course, it's all right for awhile, Ruthie, but you're not getting any younger. You should be thinking of getting married."

"I've been thinking about it, Selma, for a long time. But it takes two, you know."

"Ruthie," Selma said, leaning over and placing her hand on Ruthie's arm, "You know New York is sometimes like a small town. People talk. Well, at a bridge party the other night, they said it looked funny—you and this girl, always together, hardly ever any dates. Ruthie, please listen, there's a new woman's hotel..."

Ruthie had jerked her arm away, saying,

"You came just to say that—not to see me, but to tell me some vicious gossip. You, my only cousin, Selma, you're sick. You should see a doctor. For two years, no calls, no nothing. Look, I think you had better leave. Two years and you have the nerve."

"Wait, Ruthie, don't jump to conclusions. It's for your own good. Honest? You're my own relative..."

"Out, out," Ruthie had shouted, then hurried to the front door and opened it.

Selma's face had turned red and she was twisting the end of her fur scarf. "I'm sorry, Ruthie. I didn't think it would upset you so. Sure, I'll leave, but if you ever need any help..."

"Help from you?" For two years you didn't come over."

"It's a long trip from the Bronx and with the kids and all."

"Sure, you have a family and it's a long trip—well, tell your friends to go to hell," and she slammed the door, then had seen Selma's trim legs and alligator pumps hurry past the basement window. "My own cousin," she murmured, "the woman's crazy," and then she had fallen on the mussed up sheets and had cried—for having such an only cousin, for it being such a small world.

Sitting before Esther's grave, she looked up suddenly, just beyond the cemetery fence and a clump of trees, she saw the buttresses of a freeway being built and she shook her head, wondering where it was going—if it would go right through the cemetery. Then she saw a few shadows and decided she had better leave—it was a long trip back on that local bus.

She stood up and whispered, "Good-bye, Esther. I'll be back soon. After all, why

should I come only on Memorial Day? I remember you every day of the year."

Then she turned and walked up the cinder path toward the gate. She passed the caretaker by a toolshed. He was putting away some hoses and a shovel.

"Oh, hello. How's everything?" Ruthie called.

"Fine, just fine."

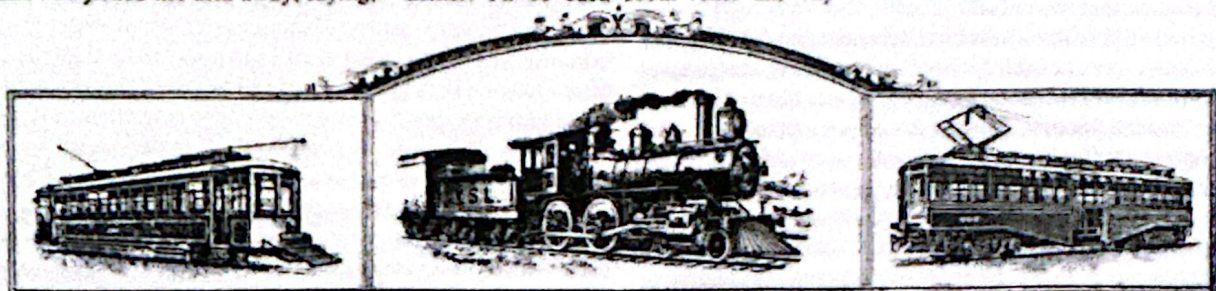
"I was wondering about that freeway. Where is it headed?"

"Right through here, Miss. Right through here. Going to go right over the cemetery. Of course, some will have to be moved. Yup, city decided it needed another freeway. Too bad, close to where I live. Only used to take me five minutes to get to work."

Ruthie nodded, "Yes, it is too bad," and she thought of poor Esther, the sounds and smells of cars rushing overhead or else being moved. If it wasn't kids on Halloween or Nazis knocking over the stones, it was the city.

On the bus, stopping at ever other corner, she thought of herself—how there wouldn't be anyone, not even a friend to care—just two dates, and she worried about it, as she watched people taking down their flags, coming home from a holiday at the beach or a picnic.

And when she reached home, she picked up the phone, dialed, and said, "Hello, Selma. It's me, Ruthie. Yes, it has been a long time. I'm sorry, Selma. After all, we're cousins. Right, forgive and forget. Look, why don't you and Irv come over for dinner. Sure, bring the kids," and she thought, we all need someone, don't we, even if it's just a cousin in the Bronx, and at least, once a year on Memorial Day, some gladiolas, pink and wet with dew.



## THE OLD RED GRANNY

by MINDY RINKEWICH

The old Red Granny lights no Sabbath candles  
She has no truck with the Almighty Blessed is He  
She hasn't fasted on Yom Kipur since she was fifteen  
The old Red Granny turns her hand into a fist and says:  
"If they had really stopped them  
That time, at Madrid,  
Things would be different."

די אלטע, רויטע כוכי האלט ניס פון ליכט בענטשן  
זי מיטן אויבערשטן - ווי אנדערע צוויי  
פון פופצן יאר אן פאסט זי ניס יום כיפור  
אין א פויסט פארקיילט זי די האנט  
און טום א זאג:  
- ווען מען שטעלט זיי טאקע אפ  
יעמאלס, כיי מאדריד,  
וואלט עס אנדערס אויסגעזען.



# WHY IS THIS BOOK DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER BOOKS?

by EVELYN TORTON BECK

Excerpted from *NICE JEWISH GIRLS*

Why? I'll tell you why. According to Jewish law, this book is written by people who do not exist. I assure you, it's all very logical; we're not proscribed, because we don't exist. If we existed, believe me, they'd be against us.

Wait a minute. Who are *they* and who are *we*? And what does Jewish Law have to do with it?

They, in this case, are the *rabbanim*, the interpreters of Jewish Law.

We, *us*, are the Jewish lesbians.

The Law is the Law. It doesn't mention us.

Actually, it is not only the *rabbanim* who have been unable to imagine us. Let me tell you a story. Very often this year, when people ask me what I was working on, and I answered, "A book about Jewish lesbians," my answer was met with a startled laughter and unmasked surprise bordering on disbelief, "Are there *many*?"—as if the juxtaposition Jewish/lesbian were just too much. To me, these responses had the force of warnings.

I got the message. Or rather, it got to me. While I fought against silencing myself completely, I did begin to hesitate before answering, to assess the safety of the terrain. I began to understand the limits that the dominant culture places on "otherness." You could be a Jew and people would recognize that as a religious or ethnic affiliation or you could be a lesbian and some people would recognize that as an "alternative lifestyle" or "sexual preference," but if you tried to claim both identities — publicly and politically — you were exceeding the limits of what was permitted to the marginal. You were in danger of being perceived as ridiculous—and threatening.

*In order to feel fully safe I need to feel known.* How so? Is visibility safety? Complex questions. Uncomfortable, uneasy answers, stirring up old hurts, old angers, old fears.

In Vienna in 1938, when I was five years old and Hitler came to power, visibility was not safe. Schools were closed to me, as were parks, stores, restaurants. Once I was sent to buy butter because I was blonde and did not look Jewish. Men came and took my father away. I am told that while the men waited for my father to get his coat, I walked right up to one of them, put my foot next to his, and said, "See, we have the same shoes, only yours are much bigger."

I did not know why or where my father was being taken, nor how long he would be gone. Later I was told: to the camps—to Dachau, to Buchenwald. My mother took me with her to the Gestapo when she tried to get him released. After a year she succeeded; I don't know how or why. My family history is a series of gaps, leaving questions to mark the spaces: What happened to my father while he was gone? Who took us in after the Nazis evicted us from our apartment? How did we get by after they confiscated the small business my father had painstakingly built up over the years? How did my father get out of the camps? My parents talked about those years, selectively. And not often.

But I remember one story well: when my father was still in the camps, my mother had arranged to have me, the elder child, sent to England where British citizens were taking in "endangered" European children. According to my mother, it had been easy to place me because I was so pretty (did not look Jewish, did she mean?). But I never went; she needed my father's permission — which he refused to

send. Though he did not know if he would ever see any of us again, my father refused to split the family, even to save me. As it turns out, the one who didn't get saved was my grandmother. When the exit visa arrived, there were only four—two for the parents, two for the children. If I had been sent to England, the fourth visa could have been used to save my grandmother. But who could know that there would be such choices? My mother, an only child attached to her mother who lived with us, later rationalized that painful decision. "It's just as well poppa didn't let you go to London . . . You were such a nervous child, you would never have survived the Blitz." Always when I heard that story I felt that I had been saved at someone else's expense: survivor's guilt is a high price for a child to pay.

I do not remember an entire year, my sixth, in Italy. I barely remember the long ocean voyage to New York on the last boat allowed out of Italy. I remember only sea-sickness and June 10, 1940, the date of our arrival; I remember measles on shipboard and how they had to mask my face with powder or we would all be sent back. *Having to hide: a sure sign of danger.*

*Jewish invisibility is a symptom of anti-Semitism as surely as lesbian invisibility is a symptom of homophobia.*

Combatting invisibility. At first it seemed an easy task. I would talk to Jewish groups about homophobia. I would talk to lesbian groups about anti-Semitism. I would talk to both groups about the need to affirm and accept difference. I would remind each group that invisibility has a trivializing, disempowering and ultimately debilitating effect on its members. And both groups would remember and understand.

But it hasn't been that simple, for each group has absorbed some of the myths and distortions about the other without any apparent consciousness of irony. How is it possible to move from this bind? To make ourselves heard and known? *If I say that Judaism is more than a religion, as lesbianism is more than a sexual preference, I begin to tap the complexity.* Being Jewish informs a woman's consciousness from the time she is young until she grows old, no matter how far from religion her family may be. Add to this the consciousness of a lesbian identity, and you create yet different patterns of seeing and experiencing the world. For Sephardic Jews and Jewish lesbians of color, the angles of vision become more multiple and more complex.

For many of us, unexpectedly, the experience of coming out as lesbians was a crucial step toward our coming out as Jews. The experience of being outside the bounds of society as a lesbian makes a woman more willing to acknowledge other ways in which she stands outside. It becomes increasingly harder to ignore the signals of outsiderhood. And soon one doesn't want to.

While most of us have some idea of what is meant by "coming out as a lesbian," the process of "coming out as a Jew," especially for a lesbian-feminist, is less easily defined and even less easily put into practice. I believe that all of the contributors to this anthology reject the patriarchal aspects of Judaism—yet it is not always easy to separate the elements in what is an old, multi-layered, complex, and sometimes contradictory culture . . .

To be born a Jew is to be part of a unified culture that is also extremely diverse. Jews are of all races and have settled on all continents, in all economic classes and on all points of the political

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spectrum (though traditionally Jews have participated in radical and liberal politics in numbers much larger than their proportion in the population — a fact that has been used against us by political conservatives). Historically, Jews have been proud of our non-homogeneous thinking and our skills in seeing complexity. "Three Jews, four opinions," is a maxim quoted with pride.

What kinds of knowing do we share? Most Jews, I would venture to say, have some sense of the Jewish tradition of prayer and study; many feel behind them the weight of the Bible; the Law (oral and written); Talmudic disputation (*pilpul*) — affectionately referred to as hair-splitting; Jewish mysticism; the ancient prayers and songs which many of us were taught as children that float in our heads—we sing their melodies, even if we no longer understand or accept their meanings.

Jews have been connected to a variety of languages wherever they have lived: ancient Hebrew, the language reserved for prayer and study; Yiddish or Ladino (the vernacular for Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, respectively); as well as the languages of the host countries in which Jews have found themselves. Some of us learned modern Hebrew, the language of the State of Israel, a language that was developed as a defiant gesture of Jewish liberation from victimhood in Eastern Europe, where Jewish existence was precarious and pogroms an accepted fact of life. Though Yiddish was denigrated in Israel because of its association with life in the *shtetl*, it is the language of some of our parents and many of our grandparents. Those of us who grew up hearing Yiddish or Ladino in the home have a very emotional response to it and know at least a few words of those languages.

An important part of what we know together is the history of Jewish survival and thus the history of anti-Semitism, which over the centuries has taken on various and often contradictory forms that have affected women as well as men, sometimes differently. These categories are not neatly separable, and frequently they overlap:

*religious:* Jews are despised and abused as heretics, infidels, and Christ-killers, and are accused of murdering Christian babies for ritual purposes.

*social:* Jews are treated like pariah, undesirables; they must abide by laws restricting where they may live and how they may earn their living; trade guilds and social groups are closed to them because of their undesirable characteristics. They are made to wear special hats or badges to set them apart.

*political:* Jews are scapegoats, held responsible for all the contradictory evils in the world; Jews are "Communists," Jews are "Capitalists."

*economic:* Jews are Shylocks, "operators" who succeed by devious means; Jews are untrustworthy, unreliable, materialistic, penny-pinching swindlers.

*psychological:* Jews become the repository of the fears and fantasies of the majority; the dominant culture's desire to assimilate the Jew is projected onto the Jew as "the Jewish plot to take over"; the Jew is said to be loud, pushy, aggressive, devious; against such a giant, force becomes necessary and justifiable.

*sexual:* Jews are the incarnation of sexuality; the Jewish woman is seen as the temptress, associated with exotic sexual practices; the Jewish male is the defiler of Christian women. The Jewish male is impotent; the Jewish woman is sexually withholding.

*racial:* Jewish blood is unclean, impure; Jews are undesirable, degenerate, dirty, smelly, suspect, peculiar, etc.

Even if we don't know all the details of this history, we know this

story; it is imprinted on our psyches at an early age. How different this list reads if I cast it into the "we voice": "We are despised and abused... we are pariahs... we are undesirables... we are the incarnation of sexuality... we are unclean, we, we, we..."

## Responses to Anti-Semitism

It is not the belonging to many groups that is the cause of the difficulty, but an *uncertainty* of belongingness.

K. Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflict* (1948)

I was pained but not surprised to feel invisible as a lesbian among Jews. I was terribly disappointed and confused to feel invisible as a Jew among lesbians.

While lesbian-feminists have increasingly begun to acknowledge diversity, anti-Semitism is still not taken seriously in the lesbian-feminist movement. Anti-Semitism has not been included by name in the important litany of "isms" against which the movement has pledged itself to struggle: sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, ageism, able-bodyism.

Some lesbian-feminist theorists claim that anti-racist work subsumes the fight against anti-Semitism, but I have not found that to be true in practice. For example, in an otherwise excellent workshop on "Racism and Lesbianism" held at the 1981 National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Conference in a discussion of the Ku Klux Klan, the Klan's anti-Semitism was not even mentioned until I brought it up. When I did, it was acknowledged (the speakers clearly knew a great deal about this aspect of Klan activity), but once the question was answered, the subject was rapidly dismissed. Was the question inappropriate to the session? Isn't it vital for us to make connections between oppressions? To see in what ways anti-Semitism, racism, and other forms of oppression are different and alike?

Actually, my experience in this session was rather positive. More often, the attempt to include anti-Semitism in discussions of racism is rejected and sometimes met with a sense of outrage that Jews are trying to take over *again*. There was, in fact, some initial resistance to having a forum on anti-Semitism at the 1981 NWSA Conference where the overall theme was "Women Against Racism." And I have been distressed to find that many gentile lesbian-feminists with otherwise highly sensitive political awareness, are reluctant to give attention to anti-Semitism, to understand how it operates, and to consider seriously their participation in it. For it seems unlikely that any individual can altogether avoid internalizing the prejudices of the dominant culture.

An instructive though particularly painful example of how anti-Semitism has been supported by the lesbian-feminist movement (even if out of ignorance and insensitivity) is provided by the controversy surrounding the charges that Z. Budapest's *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries, Part II* is anti-Semitic. Among other instances cited is the following offensive passage:

The Jews carried a deep burden of guilt about what they had done to Lilith, the Great Goddess, and to cherubs in general. Lilith cursed them as a result, and in effect told them that nothing would go right for Jews again until her worship had been reinstated. Could this be the final solution to the Middle East crisis?

This passage, which is blatantly anti-Semitic, not only blames the Jewish people for bringing Jew-hating upon themselves, but also suggests that they deserve it. Even worse, Budapest seems to support Hitler's "final solution" to the Jewish question — the annihilation of all Jews. The fact that several of Budapest's coven sisters and supporters are themselves Jewish in no way mitigates the anti-Semitism of this passage; in fact, it serves to highlight the ways in which some Jewish women have internalized anti-Semitism.

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In response to a letter from Naomi Dykestein protesting the anti-Semitism in Budapest's book, Z. Budapest was at first extremely defensive and even insulting, using the explicitly anti-Semitic epithet "little dyke princess" to discredit her critic, and insisted that the charges of anti-Semitism were simply an excuse for "trashing." In response to continued public pressure from Jewish women (whom she referred to as the "Jewish Mafia") and concerned others, Budapest eventually inserted an author's note that reads in part: "I regret that passages in my book have been understood as anti-Semitic. This was not, and is not, my intention. The use of 'final solution' (on p. 197) was an anti-Semitic act and most regrettable." Several follow-up letters to feminist newspapers express dismay and dissatisfaction with Budapest's retraction. Budapest neither analyzes her own words, nor explores the feelings behind them. Instead, she shifts the responsibility for her own anti-Semitism. In another letter published in the feminist press, Budapest claims that her initial defensiveness stemmed from issues of "personality" and the "unpleasant circumstances surrounding the charges." It is important to understand that this feeble explanation, which entirely obscures and evades the issues of anti-Semitism, is typical of the way Anti-Semitism operates to discredit the victim. Such patterns of reversal should not be legitimated, since they serve to silence those who would speak out . . .



Dr. N. Sirkis has called Yiddish "a jargon . . . a lie" and Yiddish hands him over to her defenders, the poet Avrom Reyzen and the philosopher-ideologist Dr. Kh. Zhitlovski, so that they can beat some sense into him. *Der groyser tants*, July 16, 1981.

In response to an upsetting confrontation between Jewish women and women of color in a New England regional Women's Studies Conference, Cherrie Moraga (*et al.*) wrote in *Gay Community News*, "We don't have to be the same to have a movement, but we do have to be accountable for our ignorance. In the end, finally, we must refuse to give up on each other."

The risks for both Jews and gentiles of entering into a dialogue were painfully demonstrated at an all-day workshop on "Jewish Lesbians and Anti-Semitism" held in Madison, Wisconsin in May 1979. At one point in the day, the Jewish lesbians asked that the group be divided, because the gentile lesbians' stories about their anti-Semitic backgrounds were creating great anxiety and pain for the Jewish women. While everyone understood the need to separate at that time, the non-Jewish lesbians were loathe to discuss their anti-Semitism with each other and found it difficult to do so; some

expressed jealousy of the developing close ties they sensed among the Jewish lesbians who were, for the first time, coming together around their common heritage, as lesbians and as Jews. Yet we have come to understand that white women must work on their racism with each other, that such education is not the burden of women of color. And the feeling of exclusion, though understandable, does not differ in kind from heterosexual women's responses to lesbian bonding.

Why is it often difficult to see parallels? Do we resist seeing them? Need one oppression cancel out another? Would the recognition that it is not *either/or* but *both/and* be too overwhelming? What would happen if we admitted that oppressed groups can themselves be oppressive? In the face of this complexity, a few facts remain clear: oppression is never less oppressive simply because it takes a different form. Success has never protected Jews from anti-Semitism. Even those Jews who considered themselves more German than Jewish were annihilated by the Nazis. Ironically, when Jews have succeeded in integrating into a society it has been used against them: suddenly every Jew becomes "the rich Jew," the penny-pinching, exploiting miser. The great American dream, "from rags to riches," is simply not acceptable for Jews, whose success is somehow always tainted. Moreover, if at certain moments in history some Jews have entered into the mainstream, it is only because some powerful groups have "allowed" it; often this is done with the purpose of using Jews as a buffer and/or as an easy scapegoat when one is needed. It is an age-old pattern for Jews — today, allowed in, perhaps even encouraged, tomorrow, ignominiously thrown out. Many people fail to understand the implications of this recurrent fact of Jewish history, and even some Jews fall for the mirage, taking the surface for the whole, refusing to acknowledge the precariousness of Jewish existence. Is that why, even now, I feel I have to justify my concern? To prove that any form of anti-Semitism is always a real danger?

Everywhere the overriding message seems to be: Forget about anti-Semitism. Or if you do see it, ignore it. This attitude prevails even in some parts of the Jewish community, particularly among those Jews who are the most politically conservative and feel they have the most to lose. "The American Jewish Committee said today it would be a 'mistake' to interpret recent trouble as signalling a 'new and dangerous wave of anti-Semitism in the United States . . . On balance . . . the Jewish position in the U.S. remains secure despite 377 anti-Semitic incidents reported in 1980.'" By the end of 1981 that number had more than tripled. How many incidents went unreported? The Human Relations Commission of Maryland's traditionally liberal Montgomery County (which saw a particularly large rise in racist and anti-Semitic incidents) estimates that only one out of ten persons reports harassment to the police. Understandably, anti-Semitism is very frightening, especially to those Jews who, despite an exterior pose of calm, believe it is always there, lurking just beneath the surface. (Jewish folk-"wisdom" warns: "Scratch a goy and find an anti-Semite.") Still, many Jews who are willing to recognize the existence of anti-Semitism seem to feel that the best survival tactic is to remain silent; possibly then things won't get much worse.

Such debate over strategy is not new. It shook and almost split the Jewish community of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when in the 1970s the Nazi party was particularly active in that city. It is in this light that we must understand the furor over the recent publication of Jacobo Timerman's book, *Prisoner Without A Name, Cell Without A Number*, in which the Jewish Argentinian publisher and editor not only exposes the tortures to which he was subjected in an Argentinian jail for two and a half years, but also accuses the leaders of the Argentinian Jewish community of passively accepting the widespread anti-Semitism which is condoned by their government. As a Jewish liberal, Timerman was singled out by his jailers and became the butt of specifically anti-Semitic abuse, both physical and verbal. While his speaking out has been criticized and his character

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discredited by some Jews in the United States, Israel, and Argentina, no one denies the accuracy of his report concerning his treatment in jail. Perhaps those Jews who are most angry at Timmerman for speaking out do not want to put their own worst fears to the test: that even if Jews speak out, no one will listen or care; that even if anti-Semitism is acknowledged, it will be dismissed as less important than other oppressions. Less important to whom?

*The discounting of anti-Semitism is itself anti-Semitic.* Through such denial the victim is made to doubt the evidence of her experience (that's how women have been driven crazy by men); and to feel shame: shame for being a victim; shame for complaining when there are "larger" issues at stake; shame for speaking out; shame for keeping silent.

What's left, it is said, is social anti-Semitism, which isn't as serious as political anti-Semitism. We are told that white-skinned Jews can always pass. Why is the possibility of "passing" so insistently viewed as a great privilege open to Jews, and not understood as a terrible degradation and denial? The prevailing mood, even in the lesbian-feminist movement, urges us to ignore the vulnerability we feel and the invisibility we experience as Jews.

#### The Jewish Image in Lesbian-Feminist and Feminist Literature

To a great extent the energy for this book came from my desire to break the silence and the cycle of confusion; to refuse any longer to feel like a victim, to raise the issue. I had to find out whether the lesbian-feminist movement would accept me as a Jew. Whether it would join me in my fight. Whether my fight was also our fight. During the last seven years I had given a great deal of energy to the lesbian-feminist movement and had come to feel more at home among lesbian-feminists than I had ever felt anywhere before — until I realized that my Jewish identity was relatively invisible unless I made a point of mentioning it.

I had managed to rationalize my shock and dismay when I found the narrator of *Rubyfruit Jungle* describing the fat Jewish girl Barbara Spangenthau as someone who "always had her hand in her pants playing with herself, and worse, she stank. Until I was fifteen I thought that being Jewish meant you walked around with your hand in your pants." In 1974, as an emerging lesbian, I didn't want to admit that the movement's leading fiction writer was basing her humor on age-old anti-Semitic stereotypes. I simply couldn't afford to take it in. So I kept silent. In those early years of struggle it seemed unworthy to make a fuss. And worse it seemed divisive. I could not yet claim my anger. I wanted too much to belong. . . .

Even in 1981 when I was preparing this anthology, I hesitated to protest publicly the anti-Semitic and racist stereotypes in Noretta Koertge's *Who Was That Masked Woman?*, a novel that not surprisingly was hailed by Bertha Harris as "the legitimate heiress to the throne of *Rubyfruit Jungle*." This is a book in which most of the Jewish characters are ostentatiously rich, superficial, and sexually promiscuous. It is also a book that contains the following observation made by the narrator:

*Take the Jews—they aren't very well liked but they do okay — get into Who's Who and all that stuff while the Poles stay down in Cicero and work in the steel mills—and the blacks — they're even worse off. What makes the difference? Is it a case of native intelligence or cultural heritage or what?*

The responses to the one review (Amy Hoffman's in *Gay Community News*, December 26, 1981) that criticized the book for its anti-Semitism and racism only served to confirm my doubts about speaking out. The following letter contains essentially all the excuses made for the book in what is probably their most offensive articulation:

You'll have to excuse me. I am not physically challenged.

Neither am I a woman of color. . . . *Who Was That Masked Woman?* spoke very directly to my experience. Why can't you East Coast theorists [code for Jewish?] leave us Midwestern ex-WASPs alone? We're gay too, you know. We can't help it if we aren't multiply oppressed. Amy Hoffman owes Noretta Koertge an apology.

Only recently has there been any public support for Hoffman's criticism. It took the form of a particularly thoughtful, well-documented letter from the lesbian publisher Pat McGloin, who concludes, "Any writer who calls herself a lesbian-feminist must be accountable to the images she perpetuates in her writing. Readers, writers, publishers, bookstores and reviewers have the responsibility to demand accurate portrayals of all of our lives." . . .

Looking at Koertge's *Who Was That Masked Woman?* from this perspective, we see that she not only appropriates and trivializes, but also falsifies the atrocities committed by the Nazis against Jews. Having broken her leg, the main character Tretona contemplates the wonders of the Kutschner rod technique being used to heal her — a technique she claims Nazi scientists had developed on American GIs: "She tried to figure out if it wasn't good after all that the Nazis had done the experiments." This seemingly harmless question entirely obscures the fact that it was overwhelmingly Jews who were used for grotesque medical experiments by Nazi doctors. While the author makes these remarks in the voice of her character, she cannot slough off the responsibility for perpetuating a false, "cleaned up" picture of history. Such insensitivity is dangerous, especially since the narrator in no way discredits or questions the character's integrity in thinking that it might have been "good after all that the Nazis had done the experiments." That virtually no reviews of these highly-praised and widely-read authors mention Anti-Semitism is a symptom of how little consciousness there is of the issue.

. . . The feminist press has also been surprisingly silent (though there has been much talk in private) about the anti-Jewish feeling expressed in the following lines in Judy Simmons' poem "Minority" which appeared in *Conditions: Five, The Black Women's Issue*.

Mine is not a People of the Book/taxed  
but acknowledged; their distinction is  
not yet a dignity; their Holocaust is lower case.

The public silence may be due to the discomfort these lines have caused, because they threaten the possibility of coalition between Black and Jewish women. The editors of *Conditions: Five* do, however, seem to be aware of the problem with Simmons' trivializing perspective on Jewish oppression and they have appended a note to that effect. However, a note by itself does little to combat the real difficulty in this poem or in this attitude. What is needed is an ongoing dialogue between Jewish women and women of color, a dialogue which has just barely begun.

Better communication might perhaps have kept sociologist Iva E. Carruthers from using a classically anti-Semitic stereotype in order to make a point about the women's movement in her essay in the anthology *Sturdy Black Bridges*. Carruthers' essay attacks the white feminist movement for "assaults to African familyhood; the theory for which is emerging from a predominantly Jewish elite group." Moreover, one hopes it is only ignorance and not malice that made Carruthers use the term "Aryan" to include both Jews and Asians. It is particularly painful and offensive for Jews to be included in the Aryan race, since six million Jews were killed under Hitler (and hundreds of thousands more tortured) solely because they were *not* Aryans. Familiarity with the facts of even only comparatively recent history and a degree of compassion would help eliminate this kind of anti-Semitism.

It seems incredibly ironic that the strong presence of Jewish lesbians (many with radical activist backgrounds) in the lesbian-

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feminist movement goes essentially unrecorded and unnoticed in any positive way by Jews and gentiles alike. Few lesbians have recorded the Jewish lesbian presence to any extent, and they are all Jewish writers: Nancy Toder, Elana Dykewomon (Nachman), Melanie Kaye, Irene Klepfisz, Alice Bloch, Ruth Celler, Harriet Malinowitz, Martha Shelley. The near invisibility of Jewish energy in the lesbian-feminist movement may itself be a result of anti-Semitism, real or feared: a response to the fear that if Jews were more visible as Jews, they would be accused of controlling the movement. Because Jews are present, yet invisible, it has been difficult to feel comfortable about claiming Jewish lesbian identity, especially when, year after year, many of our feminist businesses urge us to buy our Christmas presents early. *Us? Our?* Again the nagging question. Should I make a fuss? It seems so unnecessarily touchy. After all, Jews are only a small minority. Then I remember. Whenever I "made a fuss" (i.e., raised the issue of lesbian invisibility) at a feminist session where the speakers failed to include lesbians in their presentations, I had the support of the lesbian community. It was understood that the discomfort was to be *theirs*, not ours. Speaking out now, as a Jew, would there be the same lesbian support? And when I finally did mention, in words carefully chosen not to offend, that I was . . . having difficulty . . . with the . . . implicit assumption . . . that we all . . . celebrated Christmas . . . with the erasure . . . of my Jewish culture and heritage . . . was it my own discomfort I was experiencing because I was publicly defending myself as a Jew, or was I responding to others' discomfort with my Jewishness?

#### Nice Jewish Girls

All the forces of civilization had worked against this, still it happened.

Elana Nachman, *Riverfinger Women*

I started this project in a spirit of optimism, rooted in my pleasure (and relief) at finally having found a sense of congruence for the pieces of my life. I have since become increasingly sobered by the ramifications of what it can mean to want to say: I am a Jewish lesbian. The truth is that it is extremely difficult to identify oneself as a Jew outside the long shadow of anti-Semitism. It is like trying to imagine what it would feel like to be a lesbian in a non-homophobic world. So this book has become the exploration of complexities, as well as a celebration of our survival . . .

Probably the single most insistent theme in this book, repeated with variation and from many different angles and perspectives, directed at both non-Jewish lesbians and non-lesbian Jews, is the desire of the contributors to be "all of who we are." In proper Jewish tradition, we ask many questions. It is our way of coming to know. So we ask, collectively, in different voices, genres, and styles: What does it mean for us to identify as Jewish lesbians? In what ways have we internalized our Jewishness? How are we, as Jews, different from each other (by place of birth, life history, relationship to tradition, race, class, age), and in what ways are we the same? What sparks of recognition fly between us when we meet as Jewish lesbians? What values and cultural habits do we share? What kinds of pride do we take in being Jewish? What fears do we share? What shame? How have we internalized myths and stereotypes, particularly about Jewish women? What similarities do we share with lesbians from other ethnic groups? How are we different? How have Jewish survival skills helped us learn to survive as lesbians? What are the peculiarly Jewish roots of our radicalism? Though the women included here actually represent a spectrum of political beliefs, I suggest that it is a radical act to be willing to identify publicly as a Jew and a lesbian.

We also explore our relationships and attitudes toward family, community, children, traditions, separatism, gay synagogues, Israel,

Jewish men, gentile lesbians (white and of color, friends and lovers), "passing" (nose jobs, name changes, and the like), spiritually, the history of our people. Jewish history, itself not written into the mainstream, is compensatory history, written mostly by Jewish men, who also leave out Jewish women. The new field of women's history has ignored Jewish and lesbian experiences; lesbian history has not focused on Jews, and Jewish women's history has avoided the lesbian dimension.

With this anthology we have made a start . . . We exist as part of a rapidly growing grassroots movement of Jewish lesbian-feminists, creating an informal network of local consciousness-raising, support, and study groups. We have even produced two issues of a Jewish lesbian newsletter *Shehechiatnu*, the editorship of which is intended to rotate from city to city.

The work has already had an impact on the lesbian-feminist community. More people acknowledge the need to deal with anti-Semitism as a separate issue. Fewer people are ready to say that anti-Semitism is dead. A greater sense of Jewish pride is emerging. Jewish lesbians have become more thoughtful about themselves as Jews and more aware of the absence or presence of other Jews. A dialogue has begun.

What I hope is that this book will also open a dialogue with the *rabbonim*. Well, maybe not the *rabbonim*, but with members of the Jewish community-at-large. I'd like them to *shep naches* from our contributions to Jewish life. I'd like to hear them say "*mazel tov*" instead of "*oy gevald*" when they see we've made a book of our own. Actually, we are just like them, only different. Robin Tyler describes her Jewish connection:

I was always very Jewish—all my relatives are very Jewish and I was raised Jewish. I'll never forget the time when somebody said, "you shouldn't wear that suit, you're too butch and that gives a bad impression." I said, "Margie Adam wears a suit," and they said, "that's different." I said, "you mean I'm too Jewish." All of a sudden, because I talk with my hands and I talk loudly, it's called butch. In my family it was called — you know — my Aunt Betty.

I wanted Robin's Aunt Betty and my mother to be proud of us, to recognize us as their offspring.

I also want the radicalism of the very outrageous, very outspoken, very political lesbian-feminists, Maxine Feldman, Robin Tyler, Alix Dobkin and Linda Shear to be recognized as part of the Jewish radical-activist tradition in Eastern Europe. As comics, Feldman and Tyler follow the tradition of Jewish storytellers and wedding jesters (who warned the brides against marriage), whose job it was to keep the community laughing and crying, revealing it to itself:

Jewish women within the movement have often been the ones to change their names . . . My last name is obviously very Jewish. Someone once asked me why I hadn't changed my name. I said to them, "I think you better check your anti-Semitism. Why haven't you asked Meg Christian?"

—Maxine Feldman

Yes, tradition. It's probably not what our foremothers had in mind, but then, did *they* ask their parent's permission to leave the old country? And where would they be if they had? Jewish humor runs very deep in Jewish culture. It is widely believed that for oppressed groups humor is a weapon, a way of getting back. But who are you getting back at when the joke is on you? Yes, Jewish laughter in the midst of pain is also healing and empowering. We have also learned to laugh at ourselves. It has become a tradition.

Tradition. The Jewish lesbian community in Madison, Wisconsin recently had a painful opportunity to merge Jewish tradition with lesbian-feminist beliefs. It was at the memorial service for Blanche Goldberg, one of the founding members of the Madison Jewish-

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lesbian group. Her funeral was as lesbian as it was Jewish. About one hundred and fifty women (and a few men) attended the service. Blanche had wanted to die at home and the lesbian community (with the help of Madison Hospice Care) had helped her to do that. After experiencing the painful months of her slow dying, the community wanted to both mourn her death and celebrate her life. Rabbi Alan Lettowsky, who had supported a dialogue about Jewish gays and lesbians at the University of Wisconsin Hillel (and had thus won our confidence), agreed to lead services. He was, at all times, sensitive to our needs and wishes. He knew who we were and who Blanche was. He had visited Blanche's home and had talked with her lover. In his eulogy, he acknowledged the loving care the lesbian community had given to Blanche. He also said it was more than any single family would be able to provide.

In the chapel, a large Jewish star replaced the cross. Tapes of women's music played in the background while the mourners gathered. Purple ribbons decorated the pulpit. The prayers were only

as long as necessary, and Alan had feminized the Hebrew so it was clear that a woman had died. Blanche was an orphan, but her lover's mother and brother had come, had wanted to be there. Just before the service began, a small circle of intimate friends — her immediate family — went through the traditional ceremony of cutting a black ribbon pinned to our clothes (the symbolic act of rending the clothes, the Jewish sign of mourning), the tape played Holly Near singing, "There is something about the women." After the blessings, we stood up and spoke about Blanche's life, of what she had done and what she still would have wanted to do. We said the word *lesbian*. We said the word *cancer*. We said the *Kaddish*. Blanche had died young, but we didn't only cry at her funeral. We also laughed, out of our pain, but also out of our Jewishness.

Unexpectedly, the bringing together of our lesbian and Jewish identities at this ceremony of mourning was healing and strengthening. Here, there was no "uncertainty of belongingness," here all was trust. If only it were possible to keep that trust alive and bring it into the dailiness of our lives. If this anthology were to make that just a little more possible, then I would sing, as Jews do at the Passover Seder, *dayenu*, "it is enough."

### THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

In a legal precedent backed by Talmudic law, a Jerusalem District Court has sentenced a man to three years' imprisonment for raping his wife.

While the defense noted that rape laws do not legally apply in cases between a man and his wife, the three judges countered that in cases of marital relations between Jews, Rabbinic law takes precedence over civil law.

The judges concluded that the Talmud "makes it perfectly clear that a woman's marital obligations do not include having to submit to forcible intercourse with her husband," and that such intercourse is a transgression of Talmudic law.

The defendant, whose wife has since divorced him, beat and raped her when she refused to have sexual relations with him. When she complained to the police, he threatened to kill her if she pressed charges.

### FREE SUB OFFER

President Reagan would rather reminisce about the good old days when he starred in B-grade movies than spend any honest-to-goodness time working as president of the United States, it was reported.

Quoting unidentified White House aides, Newsweek magazine said the president spends only two or three hours a day working.

"There are times when you really need him to do some work, and all he wants to do is tell stories about his movie days," one aide complained.

When the U.S. shot down two Libyan jets, the president didn't even know about it until after it was reported on television.

A free Shmate sub to the person who can best answer the question, "Who is really running the White House?"

Another free sub will be given to the Shmate reader who can best translate the following

publisher's blurb into English.

#### THE YOUNG CHILD AS PERSON

Toward the Development of Healthy Conscience

*Actual experience and well-developed theory are used to describe how the pre-school child is helped to become fully person. Focus is upon the child as Life World, healthy conscience formation and the teacher as a personal "presence".*

*Understanding the child as a Life World, striving to function and also to be in relationship, is used to make sense of puzzling behavior and to find ways of effectively working with children. Conscience is developed as interiorizing and deeply caring for others, organizing personal meanings, sensing possibilities and participation in creating a "justice culture."*

## CORRECTIONS

On page 23 we printed the partisan song, "Zog Nit Keynmol". Four translations from the Yiddish were available and the one finally decided on had no translators credit. A discussion among several people changed several items in that translation. *Shmate* has been informed by Regina Rothman of Los Angeles that the basic translation we used was the work of her brother, Aaron Kramer. We are pleased to give him his richly deserved credit, even if belatedly. Also, we believe it is appropriate to reprint at this time, Kramer's translation of the two verses we altered.

From the land of palm trees to the far off land of snow  
we shall be coming with our torment and our woe;  
and everywhere our blood has sunk into the earth  
shall our bravery, our vigor blossom forth.

This song was written with our blood and not with lead;  
it's not a song that summer birds sing overhead;

it was a people among topling barricades,  
that sang this song of ours with pistols and grenades.

On page 7, Scaife's fortune should be \$150 million, not \$150 thousand.

Graphics credits for the first issue are hereby, with apologies for tardiness, given. The cover was done by Cheryl Nichols of Albany, California. Friend of the earth, friend and lover of Victor, friend and mother of daughter to be born by the time you read this. The "Editor's Dream": no surprises, on time. Prototype for "After The Revolution".

The cartoon at the bottom of page 28 was done by Barbara Ingham of Berkeley: easily amused pseudo-potter, mother, relic of the 60's.

The buttons on page 29 are from the collection of Berkeley's Dan Trupin, half-century veteran of coast-to-coast progressive struggles.



# AMENDING ISRAEL'S LAW OF RETURN

CREDIT: *DIRECTION* Sept. 1981

by DAVID GORDIS

The attempt by the Agudat Yisrael party in Israel to exact as a price for its participation in the current coalition government a change in the "law of return," and the reactions to this attempt both in Israel and in the United States have opened a new chapter in the history of the relationship of world Jewry to the state of Israel. It is perceived as a dramatic turning point by many in the American Jewish community, and having just returned from Israel, I can report that many in Israel share this perception. The unprecedented response of Chancellor Gerson D. Cohen is merely one indication of the significance of this issue.

Why is this the case? Where does Conservative Judaism fit into the picture? Where do we go from here?

Let us first examine the issue itself. The proposed change is, on the surface, quite benign. What is being demanded is the introduction into the text of the law the phrase "conversion according to the Halakhah" as the only appropriate means for a non-Jew to qualify as a Jew under the terms of the "law of return." As a Conservative rabbi, my requirements for conversion to Judaism are identical to those of my Orthodox colleagues. I, too, insist on conversion according to the Halakhah. Why then do I object so vigorously to this change? The answer is twofold; first the "law of return" issue does not stand in isolation, but must be viewed in the context of the overall status of non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel. Second, despite appearances, what is before us is not a religious issue but a political one. It is no secret that Israel is the only country in the western world in which religious discrimination against non-Orthodox Jews exists. "Non-Orthodox rabbis cannot function as rabbis in such areas as marriage and divorce. Non-Orthodox religious institutions, unlike their Orthodox counterparts, do not receive governmental support. On the contrary, barriers are created at every point in the development of synagogues and religious schools representing non-Orthodox ideologies. The chief rabbinate of Israel and the local rabbinic authorities, functioning in quasi-governmental capacities, periodically issue denunciations of Conservative and Reform Judaism. During the last High Holy Day season, for example, large advertisements appeared in all the newspapers in Israel proclaiming that no one who heard the sound of the Shofar in a Conservative or Reform synagogue fulfilled his or her religious obligation. It is within this context that the proposed change in the "law of return" must be viewed.

At the present time in Israel a "status quo" concerning the relationship of religion and the state has been reached. This "status quo" is not satisfactory. But the proposed change would further extend the discrimination which already exists against those of the non-Orthodox persuasion. For the first time, the State of Israel would adopt a law which concerns not only citizens of Israel but the entire Jewish people. It would disenfranchise from their status as rabbis, thousands of Conservative and Reform rabbis from around the world, ordained by recognized rabbinical schools who have been chosen by the vast majority of the Jewish community to lead, to teach Torah and to interpret the Jewish tradition. It would exclude from the Jewish community thousands of converts to Judaism who are accepted as Jews everywhere else in the world. And this is precisely the intent of the proposed change. Recently, The New York Times quoted two Orthodox leaders who were asked to interpret the change. The first responded that the change was absolutely necessary in order to oppose Conservative and Reform Judaism. The second responded that the objective of the change was to prevent Conservative and Reform Jews from coming to Israel. What is involved is not a religious question but a political question. If the concern of Orthodox authorities were in fact for the Halakhah then a conversion performed according to the Halakhah by a non-Orthodox rabbi would be accepted by them as valid. This is not the case. They reserve for themselves the right to judge the qualifications of those who would function as rabbis. There is no doubt that they will continue to declare ab initio any procedure performed by a non-Orthodox rabbi to be invalid. At issue is power and control, not Jewish law. The proposed change with its explicit reference to Conservative and Reform rabbis represents the concretization in the law of the State of Israel of a discriminatory practice affecting the entire Jewish people.

It should be stressed, however, that the reaction of Chancellor Cohen and others is directed not at the Orthodox religious parties in Israel. They will continue to assert, through whatever political means they can, their exclusive right to judge Jewish legitimacy and to oversee matters of Jewish religious law. There are within the Conservative Movement those who feel that our appropriate response should be to attempt to impress the Orthodox authorities with our Halakhic credentials. I believe that they are wrong.

The Orthodox establishment in Israel will never concede the legitimacy of Conservative Judaism. It will never voluntarily give up the control and authority which is granted it by the government of Israel. Our protest is directed to the State of Israel itself for allowing this gross discrimination against the vast majority of the Jewish people who are not Orthodox. That an issue of this importance is traded on the block in the process of bargaining for a coalition is totally outrageous and unacceptable.

It is important to keep in mind what the stakes are, for they go far beyond the dignity and the legitimate rights of non-Orthodox religious ideologies. In Israel there are thousands who are attracted by Jewish tradition, are concerned for Jewish continuity and see the tradition as a vehicle for that continuity. But many of these are offended and alienated by the primitive and obscurantist Orthodox ideology which is currently the only "legitimate" alternative in Israel, and by the moral and intellectual sterility of current religious leadership. As a result, they are lost to Jewish religious life. The long-range consequences of the lack of availability of modern, attractive and authentic Jewish religious alternatives in Israel are not to be underestimated.

What specifically is being advocated by those of us in the Conservative movement? We are not arguing for a total separation of church and state. We do not have total church-state separation in the United States and we believe that in a Jewish state there must be some reflection of Jewish values and Jewish tradition in the legal system and political structure of the state. We insist, however, that this must take place within the context of the principle of Jewish unity within diversity and the recognition of historically valid approaches to Jewish tradition, the legitimacy of which is recognized throughout the world. This translates into three objectives, one short-range, one intermediate range and one long-range.

The immediate objective is to resist changes in the status quo which further compound the prejudice and discrimination against non-Orthodox Jews and their religious leaders. The current attempt to introduce a change in the law of return is such an instance and must be resisted with every resource that we have. Our intermediate range objective is to insist that in those areas where the citizens of Israel choose to accept Halak-

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his standards as the law of the land, those Halakhic standards be applied in non-discriminatory fashion. If what is required is precise adherence to the demands of the Halakhah then all those who accept and meet those requirements should, in fact, be accepted as legitimate, and procedures under their supervision should be declared valid no matter what ideological label they wear. Adherence to the Halakhah should be supervised by bodies who do so not out of self-serving political objectives, for these ensure only the contamination of Halakhic criteria with selfish motives. Our ultimate objective is to move the State of Israel towards a society in which religious freedom for all Jews exists, and in which a variety of historically valid and authentic Jewish religious approaches can develop freely. The competition for the allegiance of the Jewish people both in Israel and throughout the world must take place not in an atmosphere of religious coercion and political bargaining but in the free and open marketplace of ideas.

I am a Conservative Jew convinced of the critical importance of Conservative Judaism for the state of Israel and of the state of Israel for Conservative Judaism. Our approach, which combines the affirmation of our commitment to Halakhah and to Jewish tradition generally, with the assertion that that tradition is the product of a living and evolving religious community, is one which for me, and I am convinced for many others including thousands upon thousands in Israel, is the only acceptable path to Jewish religious and spiritual regeneration. We have laid a foundation for our work in Israel. The Jewish Theological Seminary's Student Center in Jerusalem, a network of synagogues and a small number of schools representing

*Israel's Law of Return was passed unanimously by the Knesset on July 5, 1950. Its exact text is:*

1. Every Jew has the right to immigrate to the country.

2. (a) Immigration shall be on the basis of immigration visas.

(b) Immigration visas shall be issued to any Jew expressing a desire to settle in Israel except if the Minister of Immigration is satisfied that the applicant:

(i) acts against the Jewish nation; or

(ii) may threaten the public health or State security.

3. (a) Any Jew who comes to Israel and after his arrival expresses a desire to settle there may, while in Israel, obtain an immigration certificate.

(b) The exceptions listed in Article 2 (b) shall apply also with respect to the issuing of an immigration certificate, but a person shall not be regarded as a threat to public health as a result of an illness that he contracts after his arrival in Israel.

4. Every Jew who migrated to this country before this law goes into effect, and every Jew who was born in the country either before or after the law is effective, enjoys the same status as any person who migrated on the basis of this law.

5. The Minister of Immigration is delegated to enforce this law and he may enact regulations in collection with its implementation and for the issuing of immigration visas and immigration certificates.

\* \* \*

*Nowhere in the Law of Returns is the word "Jew" defined nor is any provision made for its definition by others.*

our approach have been established. That our impact has not been greater is the result, in part, of the hardships which have been imposed upon us by Israel's religious establishment. But that is only part of the answer. We have not yet taken seriously the challenge and the opportunity that Israel offers. We must never waver in our support for Israel; her existence, strength, and vitality are critical to the destiny of the Jewish people. But we must begin to channel our support to Israel in ways which will build the kind of Jewish society and Jewish life which is vital to the survival of our people wherever they may be. If the structure of present campaigns and support organizations for Israel makes it impossible for funds to be earmarked for synagogues and schools of our movement and instead, either directly or indirectly, supports those who heap abuse and offense on our efforts, then alternative means must be devised to directly support our work in Israel.

This may sound coldly self-serving but I emphatically assert that it is not. The greatest danger to Israel today lies not in the threats of her Arab neighbors, as substantial as they may be. It lies rather in a sense of self-doubt and alienation on the part of our brothers and sisters in Israel who are called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice for the State. In my view that doubt and crisis of motivation is directly related to the alienation of Israel's population from Jewish tradition. Those who currently control religious life in Israel and who insist upon choking off religious creativity which is possible only in a free and openly pluralistic environment, are day by day, hour by hour, contributing to this alienation. It is within our ability to present to our brothers and sisters in Israel a sensitive, intelligent and life-enhancing Jewish tradition. It is our sacred obligation to do so with all the energy and resources at our command.

## S H M A T E A W A R D S

*To the State of Arizona  
we award the*

### ORDER OF THE BURNING CROSS

Arizona's Department of Economic Security has been carrying a help-wanted listing for the Phoenix chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. The job pays \$3.90 an hour to sew sheets, and the Klan is identified as "an equal opportunity employer."

*Our glow-in-the-dark SIGMUND is being awarded for this meritorious example of sensitivity and sharing.*

Dreux, France

A 37-year-old participant in a group therapy session died sandwiched between two mattresses as four people walked

over him to stamp out his complexes, police said yesterday.

An autopsy was ordered to determine the exact cause of death of Pierre Beaumard, who was attending the session because he felt incapable of communicating with other people, particularly women, and suffered from obsessional fears.

Police in this town west of Paris questioned ten other participants who were present when Beaumard died, including the 177-pound psychotherapist who was in charge and led the mattress-stomping session.

Group psychonalysis, introduced from the United States, has become increasingly popular in France over the past few years.

*On rare occasions, certain individuals rate two awards. Thus we hereby grant the GOLDEN EXPERT and the IT-TAKES-A-THIEF-TO-CATCH-A-THIEF awards for exemplary service in elucidating the educated approach to decision making.*

To combat the rising risk of airline hijackings, 2 psychiatrists, unbeknownst to each other, were hired as special security guards by an airline. They were separately instructed to arrest anyone who displayed signs of "mental instability." They took up their posts and went straight to work, looking for suspects. Several minutes later the first culprit was seized—one psychiatrist zealously arrested the other psychiatrist.



# YEHUDIT, LIKE THEN

by ELAINE STARKMAN

"She doesn't need this! Too much strain!" he shouts, her father, the *shul*-goer, the pious guardian of tradition. He didn't say "too much strain" for our sons. *Boys are different.*

"Yes, she needs it!" I shout back, the silent, rebellious mother with my own need to defy him. For once I'm pushing for religion and he's saying no. A strain in our daughter's instamatic pleasure-seeking world. I barely believe my own insistence; it must be an effort to cure my neurosis that set in from our attempt to settle in Israel...

Ten years ago. Like yesterday. Selling the house, the car, packing, saying good-bye. Foolish to think we could have settled, we with so little understanding of what *aliyah* means, people swept away by personal, emotional needs.

Judy was just four when we returned, only spoke Hebrew. "*Tiri et ha prahim ima.*" I'll never forget that sentence.

"Isn't she cute," friends cooed.

"She doesn't remember a word of English," family scolded.

Within two weeks she stopped speaking Hebrew, she lost every word she'd ever learned. Was it then she decided never to learn the language again? And they all say, "Children adapt easily..."

Half-child, half-woman thrusting herself into the adult world, accepting only its pleasures but none of its responsibilities.

I can hear the rabbi now. "Don't worry. The bat mitzvah will work out fine. She'll learn her portion. Everyone else does, eventually."

As if he can relieve my anxiety. He doesn't know her determination *not* to learn. No, how can this easy-going native San Franciscan ever know her — or me? Does he sense my continual doubt as I sit here during services to which I must drag her? Yet it's I, not her father, who insists on the ceremony. Could it be I want this bat mitzvah for myself? For her to accept fully what I cannot, for her to fulfill my secret wishes of being comfortable with formal religion?

What's bat mitzvah, anyway? An arbitrary division between sexless childhood and female adolescence, between Flintstones and Fleetwood Mac, bat mitzvah for the daughter of two inconsistent parents who brought her to this northern California town via Israel. Now if I were Orthodox, I suppose I'd insist even more,

lest Judy be discriminated against for being female!

I'll have to think of every trick to attract her attention. Her portion, *Exodus-Pekudey* is so dry. "Hatnufa," hot tuna pie; that's a good one. "Vavim," a word out of Dr. Seuss. Him she used to love.

My teenagers already teasing. "We're gonna throw rotten eggs." Heartless boys. "And don't embarrass us with any of your poems, Mom," they chime in together.

A *Havdalah* service, of course! We must have music. Whoever heard of a *simcha* without music? Only a conservative congregation, that's who! They'll make you *shlep* to a restaurant for that. *Fressing* is okay, equal participation for boys and girls, but no music in synagogue on *Shabbat*! We'll have to wait for nightfall. But in the synagogue, yes, it must be held there. And family involvement is just as important for her as for her brothers. Grandpa with his old *brochas* learned sixty years ago, the boys with a vestige of an Israeli accent, Grandma, who never liked *shul*-going. And the baby sister, to prepare her, too.

What to wear? Only one answer: California casual. And if she absolutely insists on make-up and platforms that night, I'll concede.

How will it all come together? Will the sound of Hebrew sing inside her head again? The song of a time beyond the world she now inhabits? "*Oh, come on, Mom, I bet they smoke pot there, too!*"

Her picture on the wall staring at me. Three years old. Standing in front of the shelter at the kibbutz nursery. Sombre, huge hazel eyes. Blonde, freckled. Little high-tied red shoes. We called her *Yehudit*, then.

Musn't think of all this now. Must just get her prepared. She even said she wanted a bat mitzvah, like her brothers, even if only for the presents. How beautiful she looks in this photo. Right before *purim*. They dressed her up as a clown. Would she have become a different child if we had stayed? More thoughtful, inner-directed, less open to violence of mass media. Who knows? She'd probably be exactly the same. She'll look beautiful on the *bimah* with her hand-sewn *tallit*. Hair darker now, but otherwise the same. The rabbi will call her up by that name we never use for her anymore, *Yehudit*, bat *Arye* and *Ilana*. *Yehudit*, like then.

## GRANDMA ETKA

by HARRY EINBERG

"Let me tell you the story my mother told me about life in Plov. Etká Fankuchen, my grandmother, Arthur and Steven's great-grandmother, was a moonshiner. Well, she wasn't exactly a moonshiner, but she sold liquor, illegally. The sale of liquor was a government monopoly. One day, the local Poles came into her house and said "Etká, put schnappes on the table." They started to drink; and you know the old saying, when you start to drink you start to talk, so they started to talk. They said, "Etká, we're going to town and we're going to kill Jews." So Etká plied them with liquor trying to keep them there. In the meantime she went back and got my uncle Sholom, Dinah's father — I used to call him Paul Revere—and told him to get the horse and ride to town to the Rabbi and spread the word."

There was no rabbi in Plov. He had to go from Plov to Mielitz. I don't know how far it was. Uncle got on his horse and rode to town, told the rabbi, the rabbi notified the authorities; they had a

telegraphic station there and they ordered a company of troops from the post. By the time the Poles from Plov entered Mielitz, they were confronted by the soldiers. As a punishment the soldiers were quartered in the homes of these poor Poles who had enough taking care of themselves. This was quite a severe punishment.

Incidentally, while this was going on they told my grandmother: "Etká, we won't touch you. You're poor. (I mean this is the economic angle of it). You're poor like we are." He says: "We have problems with the Jews in Mielitz. Our farms are mortgaged to them. We can't get out from their clutches." Mama said this was true in many cases. Many cases it wasn't. Many of the people who held mortgages were decent people but others could really be very severe. This was the type of life was lead. It was a very primitive life, but the people were very self-sufficient and self-supporting. And, they were tough people.



# NOT THE BEST HEBREW STUDENT

by MINDY RINKEWICH

(From the Yiddish)

My first Hebrew teacher, what's his name? Karmi? Karmi? Karmy? I don't know how to spell it to this very day. Hebrew never was one of my strong points. He wasn't even my very first Hebrew Teacher. I had had others in the secondary and advanced courses of my Yiddish school. Yet I feel they don't count, somehow, because they did not belong to the true breed of Hebrew teachers. For one, they had not Hebraized their names. Each and every one of them had an honest to goodness, traditional, Jewish family name. Secondly, they never bothered anybody. This Karami, an energetic individual in his early forties, Israeli born, started picking on me from the very first day of the Hebrew course I was taking at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The course began with an announcement that the students would be called by their Jewish names in class. Quite a few of them had biblical names. In a few other cases he managed to get biblical names out of popular American names of that period. When my turn came I informed him that my Jewish name was Mindl. "That," he said, "is not a Jewish name. It will have to be changed to Minukha, which means calm in Hebrew."

"What do you mean it's not a Jewish name?" I replied, raising my voice and not at all living up to my proposed name. "As a matter of fact only Jewish girls are called by that particular name whereas very many non-Jews have biblical names."

But he wasn't interested in the facts. He stuck to his guns. "In any case Mindl is not of Hebrew origin." The Jewish names he had originally called for suddenly became Hebrew names. He laid down the law to me. In this classroom he was the boss and in this classroom my name would be Minukha and that was the way it was going to be.

That was not the way it was going to be, however. I stuck to my guns too. I told him I wouldn't answer if he called me Minukha and I didn't. I got my way easily enough. He must have realized that he was not in Israel but in America, that if he attempted to force the issue chances were I would go straight to the dean, say all sorts of awful things about him, maybe ask for my money back and that, in all probability, he would soon be called to the dean's office. For me it turned out to be a very minor victory.

After class I went over the matter in my mind a couple of times. Suddenly the point of it all became clear to me. He had been entrusted with a job calling for one hundred percent success. There would simply be no more Mindl's. The Karmes did not intend to allow it. This episode took place about five years after World War II when memories of the Holocaust were still so fresh in everyone's mind. "Didn't Hitler kill enough Mindl's for him?", I brooded. "So there must not be a single one left."

Though he no longer attempted to force the Hebrew name on me, he did pick on me a few times. "I know the kids who take those Yiddish secondary studies," he once said to me. "Even they don't speak Yiddish well." He happened to have a student who had completed the Yiddish studies and who did speak Yiddish well right in front of his eyes. He chose to ignore it, refusing to let anything mar his vision of total annihilation. I didn't answer him. All I did was frown a little and mutter through my clenched teeth quite inaudibly, "Drop dead!". At the time, that expression was on everyone's lips. At the slightest provocation it was, "Drop dead!" It was used all the time for serious quarrels and sometimes one would say, "Drop dead twice!", half jokingly, when only slightly annoyed.



A Storm in a Glass of Ink. Dr. Sirkin (Hebraist) and Dr. Zhitlovski (Yiddishist) argue it out. Right here the question is being settled as to whether the children of Israel should speak Yiddish or Hebrew in Eretz Yisrael. (Der greyser kundes, March 22, 1918)

After the time he mentined the Yiddish secondary courses he left me alone. He saw that I was a serious student who always did her homework. Moreover, we were young adults, long past the stage when a teacher could get away with making a scapegoat or, for that matter, a pet of one of his students.

I completed the course during the spring semester. At the end of that summer, when I was already preparing for the following school year, I ran into a girl from my Hebrew class. She seemed very pleased to see me and asked me all sorts of questions. Did I have a good summer? Did I intend to take Hebrew again?

"I don't know. To tell the truth I'm not that attracted to it. In any case it won't be at the Jewish Theological Seminary. I've had enough of Kermi."

"Karimy?" Haven't you heard? He died of a heart attack a few days after the end of the term. Isn't it a shame? He was still young. They say he was never sick before. Terrible!"

To tell the truth I found the whole business a bit unsavory. My father had a bad heart. For years and years I had been haunted by the

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



## STUDENT: *continued*

memory of his first attack, by the shriek of ambulance sirens, by my mother's tearful whispering about private nurses and oxygen tents, about the hospital where I was not allowed to visit him at the age of nine, by the constant fear that it might start all over again any minute.

Naturally the Kemmy affair was pure coincidence. Of course "drop dead" is an outright curse, but, twentieth century Americans who use it do not believe in curses. As far as I was concerned, it was an outburst of disgust with his personality rather than an attempt to annihilate his person. As I hissed those words between clenched teeth I never dreamed anything would come of them. But, if it worked it worked!

Guilt feelings? Oh, come on! As he stood there, a self-satisfied smile playing about his lips, taunting me about the students in the Yiddish secondary courses who don't know Yiddish, wasn't he aware he was taking my heart out? Wasn't it a conscious attempt on his part to deprive unfortunate people, forced to grasp at straws for their existence, of their last hope? Wasn't he, in his own little way, wishing others the same thing that ultimately befell him?

The only question in my mind was whether his demise would serve any useful purpose. There are hundreds of others waiting to take Kram's place. Every little Sabra is just dying to come over here to instruct the American Jewish community in the way of true Judaism and get a good look at America while he is at it. The Jewish Establishment does not lack for good American dollars to send them over either.

Since I'm not entirely sure of the efficacy of this method in furthering the Yiddishist cause I try to sound people out on it from time to time. When we Yiddishists get together and I am introduced to people they ask me, as is our custom: "What are you doing for Yiddish?" Whereas others reply "I teach Yiddish," or "I am a Yiddish poet," or "I set Yiddish poems to music in order to popularize them."

## מאַרוואָס סײַדלאַך אַנטפּרעגן פֿון דער היים



Why Gosh Run deep from How While before, rightness (Orthodoxy), Yiddishism and Hebrewism are 'busy' with petty rivalries. Assimilation comes to court and to corrupt Jewish youth. (Der greyer lands, March 24, 1926)

I usually say: "Well I once put a *shelikh*", whose intentions toward us were far from benevolent, out of commission. You may safely assume that I know how to pull off a thing like that. I just wonder whether our movement really benefitted from it since the Jewish Establishment does not lack for *shlikhim*. I would really like to hear your opinion on the subject. I mean should we continue to make use of this method to further our cause and, if so, whom shall we go after?"

\**Shelikh*: Hebrew for messenger. An Israeli, in the pay of the Jewish State, sent abroad to educate Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

## WHO HAS A STAKE IN THIS?

She was baffled  
She had thought  
only vampires  
shied away from the sign of the cross;  
but here were Jews,  
her Jewish sisters,  
refusing to go caroling  
insisting that Christmas  
is a religious day  
forgetting that decorating trees  
was a pagan rite  
saying, even, that pagan  
is not Jewish

She was baffled.  
She had thought only vampires  
shied away  
from the sign of the cross; but  
here were Jews, her  
Jewish sisters,  
who gave their children  
no Santa Claus  
no Easter Bunny  
who remembered their mother's warning  
to place thumb between first two fingers  
when passing a church  
remembering but no longer spitting  
when a priest walked by.

She was baffled.  
She had thought only vampires shied  
away from the sign of the cross; but here were  
Jews her Jewish sisters  
gathering together, alone, without her  
singing songs  
in languages she was sure they did not know  
getting angry  
at words she was sure they did not know  
getting angry  
at words she had not meant to say  
had not said with the meaning they insisted was  
being touchy, touchy touchy  
on all kinds of subjects: class, race, Israel,  
styles of talking, attitudes on living,  
jokes about mothering.

She was baffled  
by this shying away  
from the cross,  
until a late night movie revealed  
a Jewish star  
sitting large  
upon Dracula's white shirt  
as Bella Lugosi cringed  
from the sign  
of someone else's savior.

by TEYA SCHAFFER



# WOMEN IN GAY/LESBIAN JEWISH GROUPS

by ALIZA MAGGID

Women have joined local gay/lesbian Jewish groups, or attended international gay/lesbian Jewish conferences for many different motives, but woven throughout is their need to affiliate with a community, to meet more Jewish gays or lesbians, to form closer friendships with Jews like themselves. These groups also serve the function of community and family, such as giving support during an illness or after a loss, helping to celebrate joyful occasions, commemorating the dead by saying *Kaddish*, helping to form basic connections, and making referrals to needed services, including help with immigration, as in the recent case of Cuban arrivals. Just as the traditional synagogue has been the backdrop for the human relations of its members, so have these groups provided a context for lesbians to build, shape, and reshape their relationships with friends and lovers. Women have worked on the issue of shyness, isolation, and other aspects of personal growth. Lesbians have also used this opportunity to work on the controversial issues between men and women. Despite sexism and other conflicts, many women have sought these safe opportunities to make friendships, often deep and lasting, with Jewish brothers.

Over the last ten years, local groups have faced many problems. Often there has been strong disagreement about the focus of the group, the emphasis on politics, culture, or religion, and the degree of formal organizational structure. There have been all the usual dilemmas of building new groups, as well as the continual struggle against the effects of homophobia, anti-Semitism, and sexism, which members face on a daily basis.

But in both the local groups and the international organization, women have gained a unique opportunity to practice leadership, often in areas new to them. Women, in leadership roles in groups that include men, have had to work hard to rid themselves of the vestiges of their own intimidation by men; they have had to learn to hold their own. Similarly, lesbians have had to learn to interact with the larger Jewish establishment on behalf of their lesbian/gay groups. Meeting with a group of rabbis or with members of a neighboring congregation as an "out"-Jewish-lesbian can be a very challenging experience which can bring much growth as well as much *tsuris*. Recently, response from the Jewish community has been more positive and this has helped break the isolation many of us have felt as gay and lesbian Jews, reminding us that we are not altogether without allies among our own people. Taking leadership has also meant building a constituency around the world, planning for the growth of a large organization and dealing with the international press, as well as government officials.

As Lesbians we join this movement for a chance to come out of the closet as Jews and as lesbians, to begin the process of accepting and defining ourselves in a fuller sense. Women's experiences in progressive movements, even in the lesbian-feminist community, have left many lesbians with the feeling that there is a single standard of appropriate or politically correct behavior. While perhaps not intended to be coercive, these expectations have often resulted in hurt feelings and a sense of invalidation. A particular strength of the gay/lesbian Jewish groups has been their unusually high tolerance for individual differences and respect for the person. This stems in part from the emphasis on building an inclusive community, but in no way does it deny the conflicts that are still present among individuals.

Many Jewish lesbians have articulated that in gay and lesbian Jewish groups they found, for the first time, a place to fully be themselves. Women in their 30's, 40's, 50's, and 60's have joined these groups, finding an acceptance not easily available in the American youth-oriented culture. Those seeking traditional religious expres-

sion or a less politically intense environment have also felt at home. People who must avoid any public identification as gays or lesbians have their anonymity respected. Groups are strikingly mixed along the lines of members' class backgrounds. Like in the old-time neighborhood *shuls*, people of all classes are comfortable attending services together, perhaps because of the unifying bonds of being Jewish and gay or lesbian. The feelings of safety that these groups provide enable individuals to feel more comfortable with non-Jews or non-lesbians, gays, and to join other kinds of groups.

## *How Sexism Affects Lesbians in Lesbian/Gay Jewish Groups*

In spite of the positive aspects of working with Jewish gay men, sexism is real and operates on many different levels in these gay/lesbian groups. This fact reflects both the sexism of the wider culture and also some aspects that are unique to these groups. In addition to the usual cultural conditioning surrounding sex roles, Jewish men and women bring specifically Jewish versions of sexism to these groups. Jewish men and women can all too easily remind each other of the oppressive situations in their childhood training (or lack of it for women). A lesbian who was denied a role in the synagogue when she was young, may be painfully reminded of that fact, simply by the presence of Jewish men around her.

The sexism in traditional Jewish observance has also been a constant struggle for most groups, and is a very complex emotional issue. Many men, and some women, find a traditional service a comforting and meaningful experience. But equally many women, particularly those who were raised in families that denied girls the right to be part of the service, are adamant about having a "traditional" service they *can* participate in. Other women feel the need to make major changes in the liturgy and seek support for this from male members of their group; their need for such support is even greater, if, as girls, they were denied a Jewish education and do not now have the tools to alter the service themselves. Women's insistence on non-sexist liturgy, including changes in the masculine forms of English and Hebrew, has produced angry reaction from some gay men. Where men controlled the liturgy they sometimes refused to make changes; when women could force the changes, some men condemned them for it. Other women feel that the sexism in the tradition is too pervasive to deal with, and that using even modified traditional services keeps them from participating at all. Sometimes they feel powerless to change tradition.

Because they are women, Jewish lesbians come to these groups with years of accumulated sexist hurts, whether or not they have a feminist consciousness about these experiences. Because of this, some women choose not to join groups that have men in them, or else, if they do join, leave at the very first sign of sexist behavior or attitude. Those that stay and struggle often give up when a particularly painful or glaring instance occurs. In one congregation, the sole woman board member resigned when, having already reached the limit of her capacity to tolerate sexist behavior, she heard a series of jokes about abortion. In another group, most of the lesbians walked out in protest over the appointment of a male spiritual leader whom they viewed as sexist in his practices. At an international meeting, a skit acted out by Jewish men that poked fun at the Jewish mother and other Jewish women, precipitated a walk-out by women conference participants. One member of a large gay synagogue described her painful position of trying, with limited success, to persuade more women to join her congregation. At the same time she felt the pressure to explain to the men why so few women attended and to con-

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vince them that they must do what is right — purge sexism in their synagogue — regardless of whether any women ever attended. Those women who do not identify as feminist may not acknowledge the sexism in these conflicts and may not openly complain about them, but they too are affected. Sexism has isolated them from other women and put them in the position of defending sexist behavior, so as to defend themselves for associating with these men.

#### *Affected Lesbians in Gay/Lesbian Jewish Groups*

By growing up female in our society, Jewish lesbians carry with them the effects of women's oppression. We have internalized many attitudes about ourselves, as women, as lesbians, and as Jews. Thus it is understandable that, under pressure, we begin to turn against ourselves and our sisters. In Jewish lesbian groups, we feel a great deal of safety, support, and commitment to working together. As in a family or with a lover, this safety can be a wonderful, rare experience; it can also serve as an invitation for us to work on long-standing difficulties in our lives, such as unexpressed anger, mistrust in others, and disappointment at our unfulfilled need for appreciation or support. But these same factors can also make the atmosphere very tense and volatile while a group learns to live with these newly unleashed feelings.

At a recent international Jewish gay/lesbian conference, a lesbian caucus was marked by tension and confusion for the hectic hour that it met. The room was jammed with forty women and the two appointed chairs had to struggle to keep order. Attempts to get agreement on endorsements of resolutions met with great difficulty. Procedural suggestions came from all ends of the room and ranged from suggestions to cancel the meetings altogether to disbanding into smaller groups. But the caucus ended with women singing, arms around each other, finally recognizing the genuine desire and real opportunities for unity, while the preceding disagreement highlighted the many feelings of difference and disunity.

Usually lesbians have already taken a step outside of traditional roles and so can act powerfully without the restriction of male-defined "feminine" behavior. But sometimes lesbians see themselves as unable to handle money, or make a public speech. The subtle assumption may be that a man might be better qualified. On the other hand, we may jump on anyone who questions our abilities, since we have been assumed to be incompetent so many times in the past. All of these conflicting feelings surface in our Jewish lesbian/gay groups. Some roles that we have been taught coincide with our strengths as human beings and it becomes difficult to distinguish old habits from true strengths. Women have long been expert at giving emotional comfort and insuring the well being of others, while men are just learning to attend to this. A woman building a friendship with a Jewish gay man may realize that she is doing all the building and he makes little contribution to the emotional content of the relationship. On the organizational level, women often do the facilitating, the welcoming, and the more overt sharing of affection. Gay men, particularly Jewish gay men, are not quite so straightjacketed by society's expectations of men, and have developed and learned to use these interpersonal skills, but often lesbians still carry a disproportionate share of this responsibility.

#### *Where Jewish Lesbians Can Go From here*

I believe that as Jewish lesbians we have more in common with each other and with Jewish gay men, than we have differences. Despite the real differences, there is a very powerful enthusiasm for coming together as gay and lesbian Jews, for making a commitment to our groups and for doing those tasks which will allow us to grow as a community.

What are these tasks? First, we must commit ourselves to the groups that we are building. This commitment will encourage more women to join. We learned an important lesson from those who at-

tended women's groups in the early 70's. In many places, the presence of just one or two lesbians attending regularly was enough to break the cycle of women leaving after one visit. We communicate something very important to each other and to new women when we show that we enjoy being in the group and intend to stay even when problems arise. Our presence also gives a firm anchor to the entire group, so it can develop beyond a superficial level.

In order to build group strength, we must also commit ourselves to the individuals in the group. This requires learning about each other and taking the risk of getting close. The health of any group also depends on its ability to constantly build new leadership and to give each person responsibility for the group's functioning. Of particular importance for the success of our groups is an attitude of pride in all our behavior to counteract the effect of sexism and anti-gay and anti-Jewish oppression.

We must also build broad coalitions with people outside our groups. Many of our lesbian/gay groups have been successful in building alliances within the established Jewish community. A large number of gay and lesbian Jews participated in the founding conference of the New Jewish Agenda, a national progressive organization working around a broad range of Jewish issues. Beth Chayim Chaoashim in Los Angeles had to do much lobbying before it was recognized as a member congregation of the Union of Hebrew Congregations. Their groundwork led to a unanimous vote several years later on the recognition of Etz Chayim of Miami and Sha'ar Zahav in San Francisco, both gay/lesbian synagogues.

As Jewish lesbians we face increasing repression as the Right seeks to erode the position of women and Jews. We do not necessarily have to agree with our allies on every point in order for us to join in coalitions around specific issues. Even when we encounter less than full, enthusiastic support of a lesbian/gay lifestyle, or when we encounter covert anti-Semitism in the gay or women's movements, we can still continue to work with people, trying to educate them. This requires an ability to stand up firmly for ourselves, and to be willing to take the risk of speaking out.

The alliances that we have built in these directions have given us a taste of how powerful they can be. We have reasons to hope that as new groups of Jewish lesbians form, a diversity and wealth of human resources will be brought together and put to use in the struggle against the many "isms" that oppress all lesbians and gays, all Jews, all people of color, and all minorities.





# R I G H T I S W R O N G

*"Mordecai and his fellows of the young generation knew too little about the history of freedom struggles or they would have known that in these stormy times one had to give less consideration to resolutions of committees and administrations and depend more on oneself, on one's own healthy instincts. Unfortunately our youth was too well disciplined and this made it possible for the Germans to obtain 300,000 Jews at a ridiculously cheap price, not a German killed. The truth was understood by the youth only when it was too late."*

*Enmanuel Ringelblum, archivist of the Warsaw Ghetto, discussing Mordecai Anielewicz, leader of the Warsaw ghetto Uprising.*

There are two stories one can pursue concerning the Beta Yisroel, the Falashas. One is the story about that branch of our people known to themselves as the House of Israel and to their non-Jewish neighbors as the strangers, the landless wanderers. These Jews have lived in Ethiopia for so long that they do not celebrate Chanukah—it is presumed they left and lost contact with the land of Israel before the Macabees arrived on the scene. These Jews have lived so isolated that until recently they thought they were the only Jews left in the world. These are a people whose numbers have gone from around one-half to one million a millenium ago to 250,000 at the turn of this century to about 20,000 today.

There is another aspect to the story of the Falashas, one which we would like to pursue in future issues of Shmate. That is the story of the prejudice and racism that have kept the Israeli establishment as well as that of diaspora Jewry from mounting the effort needed to save the Falashas community from probable extinction. This is the story of a world community of Jewish and Israeli leadership that can organize quick and effective campaigns to bring out the Jews of Yemen and the Jews of Iran, a leadership that can exercise enough pressure to get exit visas for many of the Jews who would like to leave the Soviet Union—a leadership which, when it comes to the Black Jews of Ethiopia, can do little but appoint committees, pass resolutions, and counsel patience and politeness.

Shmate is looking for someone to write that story for a forthcoming issue. Meanwhile, contact the following for further information: American Association for Ethiopian Jewry

340 Corlies Ave.  
Pelham, N.Y. 10803  
914-738-0956

304 Robin Hood Lane  
Costa Mesa, Ca. 92627  
714-851-2049



There are also two stories concerning Soviet Jews who choose to emigrate. One is the tale of people who, for many different reasons, choose to leave that which is familiar and risk the unknown. For some the motivation is religious, cultural, and ethnic persecution. For others, it is the hope of economic advancement. It is the tale of bureaucracy, capriciousness, politics, and personal courage at one end and adjustment, maladjustment, joy, disillusionment, culture shock, and politics at the other end. It is the tale of the first immigrant Jewish community in the U.S. in fifty years, one which, as it comes of age, will have a powerful — though as yet undefined — effect on American Jewry at large.

The other story concerning Soviet Jews deals with whether international efforts directed at these people is for the purpose of helping them or for the purpose of providing bodies to populate Israel. The Israeli government has basically taken the position that only those Jews who chose to go to Israel should be helped. In this they have had the support, both active and passive, of much of the organized diaspora leadership. As the percentage of emigres going to Israel dropped from over 90% in 1973 to about 20% last year, Jewish "relief" agencies have tightened the screws on those Jews who have left the Soviet Union. This myopic policy, in addition to being morally reprehensible, has produced some bizarre effects. The Satmar Chasidim who oppose a pre-Messianic Jewish state in Israel, actively offer help to those Jewish emigres who would like to come to the U.S. As a result of Jewish Agency screw-tightening, their share of the resettlement "market" doubled from August to October of last year. By March of this year, the figure went up another 60% to a total of 40% of all refugees. A second effect of this policy is that more Jews are now converting to Christianity as a way of obtaining aid in their efforts to go somewhere other than Israel. The causes, workings, and effects of this discriminatory policy comprise a story we would like to cover in detail. Articles and authors are hereby solicited.

The two story theme is not yet played out. We have one more situation which needs be dealt with, that of Argentine Jewry. The first story, readily accessible in a number of places, is that of the largest Jewish community in Latin America, a community living in the most cosmopolitan country in Latin America, a community with a large percentage of Holocaust survivors living side by side with the world's largest community of German Nazi emigres. This is a Jewish community living in a land where over 20,000 political prisoners have "disappeared" in the last seven years of rule by a virulently anti-democratic military dictatorship, a land where anti-Semitism has gone from the passive and endemic to the functional and political.

One would think that such a situation would be of concern to all Jews. But, this is, unfortunately, not the case. So, we have another story, the story of Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, and the Commentary crowd, the story of the House Jews of the non-Jewish conservatives presently running the American government. This is the story of those Jews who denounce descriptions of Argentinian anti-Semitism as leftist propaganda, who declare that reactionary military dictatorships such as Argentina's should be supported no matter what since they are anti-communist, who, in a gross parody of Talmudic analysis, differentiate between authoritarianism and totalitarianism as moral forces. This is the story of those who take the words of Jacobo Timerman not as a blast of the shofar calling out a warning but as the shrill cry of a frustrated radical. This is the story of those who, having sold themselves, think little of selling out others. This is another story we would like to see in Shmate.



# LETTERS FROM MY AUNT

by MAIDA TILCHEN & HELEN WEINSTOCK

*In June 1974, I began a wonderful correspondence with my Aunt Helen. She has recently celebrated her sixty-second birthday, and lives in Israel. As you will discover from these letters, my aunt is a lesbian.*

*Every lesbian and gay man has probably wondered whether she or he has a gay relative. Aunt Helen had always been my most mysterious relative, and I often wondered about her. Unlike my other aunts, who were married and lived in New York, she never married and lived in San Francisco.*

Maida to Helen:

December 1974

To be perfectly frank, I am very curious about you. I spend a lot of time thinking about the different ways women might live their lives and yours is unique from most women your age that I have met. If you don't mind telling me, I'd like to know how you feel about the choices you've made in your life: to live far from your family, to live in a "bohemian" city like San Francisco . . .

Helen to Maida:

January 1975

If you had seen one picture taken of me when I was four or five years old you would not have had any doubts. I believe that homosexuality is, in the majority of instances, a result of environmental influences and from the earliest days it was said of me, "Helen is just like her father." I remember once when I was around seven and getting my hair cut that the barber asked how the back was to be cut and my mother said, "pointed, like a by, because she likes it like a boy."

I read Krafft-Ebing when I was fourteen and attended psychology lectures with my mother. She was devoted to a Freudian psychologist, Dr. Arthur Frank Payne, who spoke on the radio and also did public lectures. After one lecture on dream analysis I wrote him. He had mentioned a book, *The Sacred Fire* (I can't remember the author) and I wanted the author's name. I also described a dream of mine (I was fifteen). He said my dream showed me to be a woman of marriageable age—in plain words (which he did not use) he said I needed to get laid. However, he forgot to give the information on the book, so I never read it. As for his dream interpretation, I thought it was as funny as could be.

About the same age, I was in Girl Scout camp. I was aware of the fact that the bugler and the director's daughter were lovers, but it seemed a perfectly normal thing to me and I didn't pay it any special attention. Also, one of the other girls was having sex relations with another girl whom she seduced. (You notice the difference in how I refer to each of these groups? The first two were lovers, the second sexual experimentation.) Years later, when I was working in Coney Island, I saw the aggressor of the second group. She was married and had a daughter, whereas the first two were gay. In Girl Scout camp I was not with the "in" group. Part of it was because of being Jewish, part because I had no spending money to buy handicraft materials and other luxuries. I opened a shoe-shine business and earned pocket money. Many of the other kids thought I was being "Jew-stingy"; aside from that I got along well with the girls and played an active part in the midnight taffy pulls, night raids, athletic competitions . . . but I was always conscious that SOMETHING was going on that I was missing out on.

I think the next thing of importance was my experience with Myrtle. We were both around seventeen years old and lived in Brooklyn, I on Union Street, she on Eastern Parkway. We were very close friends. Both of us devoured books although I had read much more extensively; she had no background in psychology whereas I had been through much of Freud, Jung, Adler, Krafft-Ebing and had fre-

quently attended lectures. Myrtle was rather introverted. I forgot whether her mother was a widow or a divorcee but I know that there had been no father figure around for many years and her mother had a strong personality. I was "analyzing" Myrtle and helping her to come out of her book world and mix with people and I was keeping a typewritten record of her progress (the self-confidence of the young never ceases to astonish me). One evening while her mother and future step-father were playing cards in the kitchen, Myrtle and I were lying on the couch together. How it started I don't remember, but before I knew what was happening we were making love . . . neither of us had any previous experience . . . it was an overwhelming tide of emotion. It was the first time I was truly aroused except for fantasies. Eventually, I had to get up and go home.

The next day as I was working in my father's store, I kept thinking of it. I could not believe it. I thought, "I must have dreamed it all." Finally I phoned Myrtle and asked, "Was I over at your house last evening?" She said, "Yes." I asked, "Did anything unusual happen?" She said, "Yes, are you sorry?" I said, "No, I'll be over again tonight." So began my first satisfactory sexual relationship. For some months Myrtle and I were inseparable; however, I finally became conscious that our relationship had deteriorated intellectually. We no longer discussed books, music, psychology. Any time we were together alone it was sex, sex, sex. Also I became worried that this might have a detrimental effect on her life. Funny, although I knew she wasn't gay, I never thought of myself as gay or not. I have often been insightful of others but unaware of my own mental processes. Anyway, I saw that we were really becoming enslaved by sex to the detriment of all other aspects of our relationship and that we were excluding other people from our lives; so still in the framework of my "analyzing" treatment I explained to her that this, which had been between us, was only a normal phase which many teenagers go through and that it was time to return to a normal life. Gradually, I saw to it that we did not meet as often and there was less opportunity and less temptation to indulge in our favorite activity. It was not as easy for me as it may sound, but I sincerely thought it was a normal phase.

A number of years later (I think it was around 1943) I brought a WAC sergeant I was going with to visit my parents and we stopped to visit Myrtle and her mother who lived a few doors up. It was shortly after this that Myrtle joined the women's army and I've often wondered if there was any connection — I mean, if meeting the sergeant influenced her to join.

Her mother and I had become very good friends and I had told her about being gay (that was after I had been to Japan). She told me that she had one sexual experience with a woman (they were both hard up and no man was available) and it had been terrific, but I never told her about my relationship with her daughter. Myrtle did eventually marry. When her mother died, many years later, I lost track of Myrtle. I never saw her again after she married but she lived a very adventurous life in the wilds of Alaska and later in some Midwestern town.

After this episode with Myrtle I went about building a "normal heterosexual" life, dating boys. I did meet, date, and go to bed with two fellows during this period, but despite my deep liking for them I felt absolutely no physical response to their lovemaking—not disgust—just nothing. In time I dropped the sexual bit entirely, putting it out of my mind. There was so much more to do in life: books, music, bicycling, hiking, and thoughts to share with friends. I did enjoy parties and dancing. I became quite adept at the smooth "goodnight" at the doorstep, perhaps with a light kiss. Not that boys disgusted me

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or seemed repulsive; they just brought forth no pleasurable physical response at all, so why bother?

When I was twenty-one I moved out of my parents' home and into a French pension on 33rd Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. There I met Vijeko, a man about twenty years my senior. He was chief engineer on a ship, an educated and sensitive man. We went to concerts, to the opera and ballet. We went rowing in Central Park, hiking in the country, wandering around the city. He became my lover and I loved him deeply; he never knew that I felt absolutely no sexual response to his lovemaking.

One day when Vijeko was away on a cruise, I saw a new tenant coming into the lobby of our building. He was a young man, pretty rather than handsome. I immediately felt that I must meet him and managed to get introduced. His name was Adrian, and in the course of our conversation he mentioned that he was going to attend a masquerade the next night. I thought, "If he is going as a woman, I know he is one of THOSE." I had until then never knowingly met a homosexual (I did not know the word "gay") but felt fascinated by this young fellow.

Sure enough, he was planning to go as a woman, so I invited him to my room offering him the loan of my hat and other accessories, which he accepted gratefully. I did not understand why I was so attracted to him—it was certainly not on a male/female level—all I knew was that I had to get to know this fellow better, that it was important for me.

Two days later he returned from the masquerade. When I asked him about it, he asked me if I was gay. I told him I did not know the word so he explained it. "You know," I said, "I never even thought about the possibility." I told him about Myrtle and about my reaction (or lack of it) to male lovemaking. Finally, I said, "Can you introduce me to a lesbian? I would like to find out."

The next day he introduced me to the only lesbian he knew. She was a hustler who preyed on women and although I did not know that at the time, I did recognize that she was not anyone with whom I'd be able to establish any meaningful relationship. However, I was determined to find out about myself and took her home with me. Despite the fact that this was just plain SEX with no pretense of romance, I was surprised to find that I had more a physical response to her than I had had to Vijeko whom I truly loved. I had no interest in ever seeing the woman again; my question about myself had been answered, and the next weekend I went down to Greenwich Village and began the search for my future life. That is when I really "came out."

Your article which included descriptions in old paperbacks of gay bars make them appear real spooky. I never was in places such as they describe or at least the places I was in were not furtive—or maybe I was so uninhibited that I wasn't aware of these aspects (the fear, the denigration). I guess you could say my final "coming out" was through the bars and once I knew my way around, they were comfortable places to be in and to relax in. Until I found my way, I sort of wandered on the fringes like a kid peeking in the window at a wonderful party she did not now how to join.

Then I saw Katie. She was about my height (five feet) with shoulder-length black wavy hair and huge, very dark eyes, and she was deaf. She always seemed to be in the midst of a group and everyone, even the not-deaf, seemed to know the hand-sign language. For weeks I haunted the bars where she went, hoping for some way to meet her. Very late one night, I saw her walking alone in the street. I ran quietly, until I almost caught up with her, then I walked quickly past her. She whistled after me and SHE picked me up (not bodily). We became "THE COUPLE" of Greenwich Village. Actually, she knew very little about what gays do in bed and much of what she did know was only by hearsay (like "cunnilingus causes insanity"). Since I knew even less, we had a fairly satisfactory sex life; however, she was

very much a role player and I was forbidden to make love to her. She appeared one day with her hair slightly trimmed. She claimed she had gotten paint on it. Gradually it got shorter. Eventually she looked like a cute little boy and all my feeling for her faded away; however, the last time we were together I did get her "turned over" and did all the things I had been fantasizing for months—including the proof that it does not cause insanity.

Although I would have preferred a more female-to-female relationship, role-playing was the way of life amongst all the lesbians I knew. One was expected to be either "butch" or "femme." Those who did not conform were contemptuously referred to as people who didn't know their own minds, so since I was not attracted by imitation men, I became "butch."

Gay boys and girls mixed quite freely. Only a small minority confined themselves solely to their own sex (socially; I am not talking about sexually), and quite often I was the only female in a group of boys and "passed" as one of them. I lived with Kay for some years and since she worked evenings, often went out with a group of boys to strictly boy bars. Only my personal friends knew I was a girl and the men brought drinks for me and my friends in an attempt to try to "make" me.

I wasn't hassled much by "dirt" (as we called men who were looking to beat up gays, male or female) because it was known that I had a pal who was from a family pretty high up in organized crime. He and I would go drinking together—just sitting and having few beers and looking over the gals—but no cruising when we were together. If any guy had ever roughed me up, my friend would have taken care of him. Also, I had one or two acquaintances on the vice squad and the regular police would tip me off before any raids, so my friends and I never got caught in anything like that.

I was lucky also that the families of all the women I have ever lived with have always accepted me as one of the family, and that until Marion came to Israel with me, my family had always been very pleasant to all of the women they met. I never got the heavy pressure to get married that many gays suffer from. One lover I had used to come to Pesach Seders with my family (she wasn't Jewish). When I finally left her because of her alcoholism, her mother said, "Even if you and Kay get a divorce, I still want us to be friends"—almost causing me to drop my tonsils into my soup, as I didn't know she knew.

As far as my parents were concerned, I believe my mother knew from the time of my early childhood, even before I did. But hers was an instinctual knowledge. I think she just accepted me as I was and never asked questions, or subconsciously did not allow herself to think about it. She and my first "permanent" lover were very good friends and often went to the beach together when I was away from New York but we have never discussed homosexuality and I don't know whether she has named it to herself in relationship to me. My father is, supposedly, more worldly than my mother, but he was shocked, and disinherited me when I told him about Marion and myself. . . .

Credit: NICE JEWISH GIRLS





## A WOMAN'S STORY:

# THE LIFE OF A JEWISH WORKER

by BRUCHA GUTRAJMAN

*translated from the Yiddish by her husband, I. B. Melispejke*

The education of Jewish children in Poland in the time of my childhood was a complex matter. From rich to poor, every Jewish family felt the obligation to send boys to cheder: they had to know how to pray, to study the Torah, and had to learn all the rules necessary for them to live a full religious life when they reached manhood. Six hundred and thirteen rules, to be exact. The women were allotted only three. That was all. The only thing a woman had to know was to be a faithful Jewish wife, so why bother about formal education? Jewish families also strived to send their boys to public school, for worldly knowledge, if they could afford it. It would be useful for the future head of the family to know how to read and write the language of the host country; a smattering of arithmetic would help in business, work, and the handling of the necessary relations with public services. Women were very few in the labor force. For better or worse when a girl married, she became a housewife. Why bother with education? That is why illiteracy among Jewish women was so scandalously high. Only later on, with a new wave of emigration, parents deemed it necessary to teach girls how to read and write, in order to enable them to correspond with relatives in America and around the world. My parents decided that now was my turn to learn how to read and write. With the tuition they had to pay for my numerous brothers in cheder, they could not afford to send me to a decent school. Don't forget that I was not the only girl in the house. The compromise was to send me to a poorly qualified melamed who taught only girls, for very cheap.

The eventful morning came, my first day in cheder. I'm full of expectations. An old hunchbacked Jew, with a red beard and tearing eyes, opens the door; the heat and stench are suffocating. In a corner, in bed, a young man is lying sick, with a pale face, absent look — maybe tuberculosis. Because of the sick man, they cannot open a window. I try to sit down, the chair is shaking; all the furniture in the house is so old that any minute it might fall apart. I never saw such dire poverty as this. It breaks my heart. My desire: to run away. If I do, he would lose my tuition, whatever it is. I stay on. The teacher brings over a tablet with the alphabet. The tablet, yellowish, dirtied by flies. My decision is firm: I will learn the alphabet right here. I had seen my oldest brother reading books. If the a.b.c. is the magic key to books, then I will overcome all the obstacles I must! I only stayed till I knew the alphabet by heart, and then painfully started to read monosyllables, and soon I made the joyful discovery of reading whole words.

Officially, there was a compulsory education law in Poland, but for different reasons, it could never be enforced. There were insufficient classrooms, a lack of teachers and most of the time, a shortage of funds. Parents who wanted their children's education very strongly had to get up before daybreak, stand in line, wait countless hours, to enroll their children. The basis of enrollment was: first, come, first served. If you failed, you had to wait another year. My mother tried hard, and failed, for two consecutive years. My disappointment was indescribable; I cried bitterly, envying the lucky children I saw through the window running to school every morning, chatting, laughing. I was helpless; nothing could remedy the situation. It made me sad but I did not give up hope: I dreamed that some day, somehow, I too would have access to learning. Meanwhile, I felt wronged.

One episode in my life, which is closely connected with my spiritual development, happened years later. In my late teens, a group of girl-friends got together. We were six, sometimes seven. We decided at all cost to acquire a better education. Having heard about a famous teacher and scholar, by the name of Zolotov, we decided to make an application. It was not easy to reach him. We succeeded only through a personal introduction. We were very privileged to be accepted. We paid the tuition by ourselves from our salaries. Our teacher was a native of Vilno. A graduate from many colleges, with tremendous knowledge. He played an important part in the field of Jewish education, was a leader in the Atheist Movement, together with a famous intellectual, Jan Hampel. Zolotov was also very active in the progressive Jewish cultural life. In a word, he was a big shot. The lessons were held one evening a week. They were to last an hour but in his enthusiasm over having such eager and spell-bound students, our teacher often continued for two or three hours at a time, to our great satisfaction. None of us had much of even an elementary education, but the others were more fluent in the Polish language than I was. The lessons, though, were in Yiddish. At the first session, he asked us what we wished to learn. Everyone wanted something else, but all of us wanted to know everything. The hunger for knowledge was a common cause. We started with the general history of culture and mythology. I don't remember ever having taken notes or written assignments. With mythology, we took a free ride into the world of fantasy, a world of legends and make-believe, so different from our real one. My friends and I became day-dreamers. We dreamed of living together while traveling to far-away places — in a house on wheels (today it is so realistic, a trailer or a camper, but not in my youth). The whole group were close friends. Being teenagers, we were all in love with the teacher. What else could you expect? We had unforgettable outings with him. He was later arrested for political activities, sent to Kartuz-Bereza, the most frightful camp in Poland, nicknamed "the slaughter-house". Tortured, he had a nervous breakdown. He went through hell, but he survived. He was a kind, wonderful person. He died in Israel in the early 1970s. Our group maintained a close friendship; some died in Hitler's camps, a few of them are in the U.S. To dream is natural for young people. As for myself, the harsh realities of daily life kept me always sober. This hindered my being in complete harmony with my friends whose desire was to fly high above the others. Was this a positive trait on my part? I doubt it.

... It was in this period that my sister got married. Like all the other girls, I wore a beautiful dress with laces and ornaments. I remember going home half asleep at my mother's side, in a "doroshka" (horse and carriage), like any rich child. This was the unique time I tasted such a luxury. The guests started to depart. Traditionally, instead of bringing gifts for the children on their arrival, they left "letz-gelt" (farewell money) at their departure. From this, I accumulated quite a sum. I was determined to accomplish something worthwhile with it, all by myself.

I looked up a small private school. I went there to enroll, with my bundle of coins. A lady asked my why Mother hadn't come along. Because she is busy, I said. She took my money, counted: I had only two weeks' tuition. I didn't know what kind of school this was and the

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lady who took the money didn't tell me either.

At home, nobody knew about it except my brother Moyshe. He was the most privileged in the house. With his stubbornness and his fights, he obtained everything he wanted. Being an exceptionally brilliant student, he is now in high school. A rarity in our family. He promised to keep my secret and help me out. After a sleepless night, I put on my elegant wedding dress with the trimming, and full of fear and expectation, I went to school. My first disappointment in the class: the teacher talks in a strange language; I don't understand a word; in my ignorance, I did not know that I had applied to a Hebrew school. What's more, they were in the middle of the semester. No beginners' section or review for newcomers. Not one word of Yiddish. The only familiar thing in the class: the Hebrew alphabet I had learned in the famous cheder. I sit motionless in my starched, treasured dress; I'm confused. The girls on all the benches are making fun of me. I don't know why, and I feel so humiliated, down-trodden, lonely. After some painful school-days, the teacher ordered me to buy a book, that means money; also, by that time, the weeks I had

paid for had almost elapsed and that meant more money. I don't have it and cannot ask for it. I talked to my brother, he can't help me. After two weeks of painful, humiliating experiences in a depressing atmosphere, I dropped out. This was the first and last time I set foot in a regular school.

My brother Moyshe liked his privacy. For the slightest disturbance, he could beat me up or worse, insult me. I, for my part, was so sensitive that an insult hurt me more than a beating. That's why I had to do what I did in complete, secure secrecy. Making sure that he would be absent for a long enough period of time, I slyly approached his drawer, took out his copy-book with his beautiful handwriting, and copied on a piece of paper the Latin alphabet, and then tried, little by little, to read store signs, name plates, till I knew how to read Polish.

In later years I went sporadically to evening schools. It was a time of political and social ferment. I was a part of the dynamic Jewish youth movement in Poland. With our strong beliefs, we were trying to solve all the problems of these stormy times. After work, meetings, lectures, demonstrations. Rarely any spare time for school. One particular school I remember well was the school of Zionist workers ("Poale Zion"), somewhat political, extremely interesting. I went there as often as I could. In conclusion: this was my education.

## LETTERS II

*The following section consists of a letter to Shmate accompanied by replies from those people referred to in that letter.*

Dear Shmate,

Will *Shmate* become "a reflection of and catalyst for the development of alternative currents within the Jewish community... a tool for mutual education and stimulation?" Frankly, I wonder. Not that the need does not exist, it does—but your performance in the first issue is disheartening.

I'll get right to the point. Will *Shmate* forthrightly confront the burning issues of the Jewish community—or skir them? Specifically, will *Shmate* publish the perspectives of Jewish anti-Zionists—or merely slanders against them. Are you aware of the work of the late Moshe Menuhin, of his great book, "The Decadence of Judaism in Our Time?" Have you ever heard of Rabbi Elmer Berger and his organization, American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism? Do you know of the work of Norton Mezvinsky, Professor of Jewish studies? Are you aware of "Jewish Affairs," the work of Israel Shahak and the Israeli League for Civil and Human Rights? Does Leah Tsemel, Uri Davis, Nathan Wienstock and others ever cross your intellectual path?

Indeed, I was disheartened. Particularly by the slanderous poem by Daniel Lev whose Ruthie he refers to is none other than Ruthie Gorton, one of the outstanding progressive (and Jewish) singers in the people's movement. I've met Daniel. I actually believe he is far more acquainted with the perspective of anti-Zionist Jews now than when he wrote the poem.

So why did you publish this poem—not to mention the snide remarks by the Chutzpah group who attended the All People's Congress? Are you afraid that someone might mistake you for being anti-Zionist, so you have to "prove" yourself? Should I question your Jewishness if you've never heard of Moshe Menuhin? Is there something wrong with Jews who think that the Zionist movement is an enemy of the Jewish people? If so, state it. Perhaps, in your attempt to remain progressive, you will end up in the same chilling schizophrenia as Larry Bush when he states that "it is conceivable that I will find myself in a position where I am defending a nation for having nuclear weapons and even, when push comes to shove, for using them."

Now, I don't want to debate the merits of Lev's poem—nor do I wish to defend the actions of the All People's Congress. What I want to know—and what I wish will come about—is whether or not you are going to print the views of anti-Zionist Jews—who, by the way, are not "terrorists," who are very much Jewish, and who have something important to say to the Jewish community? If not, I'm afraid what might have had the hope of becoming a many-colored robe will remain nothing but a shmate.

Hilton Obenzinger  
San Francisco

Shalom,

Due to shortness of time, I must make this brief. I wish to make two comments. First, my poem was meant to creatively release my anger and frustration over Ruthie's blind, anti-Semitic song. (The only thing I liked was the title.) However, I did not "slander" Ruthie or wish to. Rather, it was Hilton who, in his blind passion to attack my poem, committed Lashon Hara (gossip) by mentioning Ruthie's entire name. Few people would otherwise have known which "Ruthie" I was referring to. I'm sorry that Hilton isn't more well read in Jewish ethics.

This brings me to my second comment: I, for one, do not feel that any Jewish voice should be stifled—even anti-Jewish ones. However, we must realize that the anti-Zionist "movement" Hilton refers to in his letter is even smaller than the Jewish Defense League (J.D.L.) or the Jews for Jesus. Should we also allow these "alternative currents" in the Jewish community a voice in *Shmate*? Also, should we allow anti-Zionists, who have a free voice in most other leftist journals, to put forth a position that essentially denies our peoplehood—relegating us to only a religion or ethnic subculture? Of course they hold this position for ethical and political reasons. But, though I wouldn't consider the anti-Zionists I know as evil or purposely anti-Semitic, I will say that most I have spoken with show a profound ignorance of Jewish history—except the miniscule current of anti-Zionist Jewish history. It becomes easy to deny Israel an independent existence when her people are only members of a religion and not of a bona fide people.

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Hilton, before I end I'll let you in on a little secret: whether you put on (Yiddish in the morning, chant the International in Yiddish, or shine on Jewish culture and "become an Indian", you will always be referred to as a Jew by the majority of both rulers and ruled. The sooner you understand that, the sooner you'll become sensitive to what Jewish nationalism is all about.

Shalom  
Daniel Lev  
Cotati, California

If Obenzinger would enlighten me as to what "snide remarks" he was referring to, I'd be glad to respond.

Myron Perlman  
Chutzpah Organization  
Chicago

Hilton Obenzinger and I probably agree on many theoretical points as to why neither of us are Zionists: we don't believe in the in-eradicability of anti-Semitism; we think Jews worldwide represent a people, not a nation; we think Israel is a center of Jewish life but not the *only* center; we believe in Jewish survival and liberation in other countries where Jews live; we don't think of ourselves or of other "diaspora" Jews as requiring "ingathering".

Yet Obenzinger calls himself an "anti-Zionist" while I am careful to define myself as a "non-Zionist". Perhaps before the extermination of European Jewry and the establishment of Israel as an affirmative action solution for the Jews (a solution endorsed — in fact, campaigned for — by the socialist states), I, too would have been an "anti-Zionist" on the ground that Zionism was distracting Jews from the struggle for socialism. But history, especially Jewish history, has an odd way of complicating our theoretical formulations. Today, being an anti-Zionist means to be against the idea of Israel as a Jewish state. Such is based, I suppose, on the notion that a Jewish state, with a Law of Return and automatic benefits of citizenship for Jews, is racist and inherently violates Palestinian rights.

First things first. Do Jews no longer need the "affirmative action" of Israel — the Jews of Argentina, of the U.S.S.R., of Iran? Is Oben-

zinger willing, in 1982, to stake Jewish survival upon the success — and integrity — of liberation struggles the world over? Given the reality of anti-Semitism of the left and right, given the slowness of liberation and the swiftness of genocide, I'm not willing to gamble! Of course Israel's own situation and policies may lead to great Jewish suffering; but, here we're talking about a situation in which Jews control their own destiny and in which the channels for progressive struggle (against Begin, reaction, etc.) are broad.

Need Israel's existence as a Jewish state inherently violate Palestinian rights in a racist way? Not if both sides in the conflict recognize that history demands compromise from them. Fortunately, there are forces in the P.L.O. — I. Sartawi, for instance — who are coming to terms with compromise in the form of a two-state solution and showing a will to negotiate with leftwing Zionists. And fortunately there are forces in the Zionist camp — especially the New Outlook crowd — who have come to terms with compromise in order to blend their Jewish survivalism with their Jewish humanism and sense of justice.

We can, in our anti-Zionist fervor (and theoretical "correctness") shout "Imperialism! Racism! Expansionism!" and "justify" a call to "dissolve" the Jewish state. But we won't defeat imperialism by refusing to account for its historical impact upon peoples; and we can't "dissolve" Israel, even if we wanted to, without asking for the destruction of 3½ million Israeli Jews. In human terms, the justice that anti-Zionism calls for is inhuman. And, that inhumanity yields a tremendous political cost — complete isolation from the Jewish masses in America and around the world for whom Israel's existence is a cornerstone of their Jewish identity. If we want to influence American Jews to heed the call of the prophets and not the priests, of Timmerman and not Podhoretz, we must first develop our Jewish identities to the point where "anti-imperialism" is moderated, is made real, by our Jewish self-interest.

The alternative is to abandon the Jewish community to the right, to chauvinists, who are making a strong play for leadership as is. Obenzinger calls my schizophrenia "chilling". I call it "inevitable," given the complexity of Middle East politics. What I find more chilling is his *lack* of schizophrenia, his single-minded purposefulness which, I fear, is the kind of thinking that could indeed produce mushroom clouds in the Middle East — an eventuality that would blast all uncompromising theoretical "correctness" into our throats.

Let *Shmate* be a voice for the survival of Israel and national liberation for the Palestinians.

Larry Bush  
Assistant Editor  
*Jewish Currents*



A *Wad Pardon for a Strong Complaint*. Hebrew writers in Palestine (under the British Mandate) suppress Yiddish while protesting the suppression of Hebrew in the Soviet Union. (*Der groyser kander*, August 30, 1966)

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